



Spotting the Signs of Malnutrition & Dehydration

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition occurs when a person is not eating enough of the right foods. This means they don't get all the nutrients, such as proteins, vitamins and minerals, they need.

Being malnourished can make a person ill as your body requires the food as a fuel to ensure it functions properly. Being ill can also lead to malnutrition as this often leads to poor eating habits. Malnutrition is not just something which happens in old age. It is important that you don't dismiss the signs as being a part of 'old age'. There is much that can be done to help prevent malnutrition. The key is to ensure that the underlying causes are assessed.

Who is at high risk of malnutrition?

- People with reduced mobility which affects shopping / cooking,
- People who are housebound
- People living alone,
- People who are showing symptoms of depression; or
- People with dementia
- People recovering from serious illness or a condition likely to affect their ability to eat i.e. stroke
- People with dental & mouth problems can cause malnutrition because they can make eating difficult and painful –the only way to check is visit a dentist for a regular check up.

Spotting the signs and symptoms:

- Is the person losing weight unintentionally?
- Is the person eating/ drinking less than usual?
- Are they experiencing any choking or swallowing problems?
- Have they constipation or diarrhoea?
- Are they unable to keep warm?
- Have they lost muscle?
- Do they complain they are dizzy or are prone to falls?
- Is there a difficulty in recovering from an illness?
- Are they showing signs of pressure ulcers, or have a dry skin?
- Are they prone to recurrent infections?
- Do they have difficulties in chewing or swallowing
- Do they complain of or suffer from a sore mouth, or tongue, bleeding or swollen gums?

How can you improve access to food?

- Sharing meals with others / going to relatives or informal carers
- Attending local cafes/ pub lunches/ visiting voluntary, community or faith organisations with luncheon clubs.
- Using private shopping services and or meal preparation services
- Using online supermarket home delivery services (including frozen meals)
- Sitting with them and encouraging them to eat. Remember eating is a social occasion.

Further information can be found at <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions>

What is dehydration?

Water makes up two thirds of our body. It is vital we drink enough fluid to maintain a healthy balance. Most people get dehydrated by not drinking enough fluids or by losing fluid and not replacing them.

Who is at high risk of dehydration?

- People who are dependent on others for provision/access to fluids
- People who have swallowing problems
- People who have a raised temperature or are sweating
- People with diarrhoea and /or vomiting
- People who have taken part in strenuous physical activities

Spotting the signs and symptoms

- Is the person eating/ drinking less than usual?
- Is the person coloured or small amounts of, and often strong smelling urine?
- Is the person regularly complaining of headaches?
- Is the person feeling tired?
- Does the person appear to have a dry mouth, lips or eyes?
- Are they lacking concentration / easily distracted?
- Do they appear confused?
- Have they constipation?
- Have they had or are prone to urinary tract infections?
- Are they always thirsty?

What to do if you are concerned?

You can help prevent dehydration in yourself or others by;

- recognising the early warning signs
- planning visits around mealtimes to get a sense of what they are drinking and if they have any difficulties drinking;
- sitting down and having a 'cup of tea' socially with relative or friends;
- encouraging around eight drinks per day such as after each meal and snack time;
- ensuring both hot and cold drinks are safely and freely accessible;
- encouraging foods which are high in fluid content such as ice cream, lollies, jellies, nourishing soups or water rich fruits such as melons; and
- supporting access to both social and health services.

Drinking enough fluid can assist in preventing or treating:

- Headaches
- Urinary tract infections
- Constipation
- Dizziness and confusion – this can lead to falls
- Cognitive impairment (memory loss)
- Kidney stones
- Poor oral health
- Pressure ulcers/ skin conditions

What to drink? Try to drink at least eight drinks per day. Any fluid, except alcohol counts including milk, water, tea, coffee and fruit juice