

Aging Healthfully Newsletter

Illinois Department on Aging



Malnutrition – A Hidden Epidemic Among Seniors

September 23rd through the 27th is Malnutrition Awareness Week!

What is Malnutrition?

Malnutrition is defined as **too little or too much** energy, protein, and nutrients that can negatively impact a person's body and its function.

It can result from undernutrition or overnutrition and can affect anyone, but seniors over 65 years are at an increased risk.

Undernutrition - caused by **not consuming enough** calories, protein, or other nutrients.

- This occurs frequently in parts of the world that do not provide adequate access to food and clean drinking water.
- It can also occur because of an illness or surgery that impacts appetite or food consumption.

Overnutrition – caused by **consuming more calories than a person needs**.

- A person can eat more calories than their body needs and be malnourished at the same time.
- **Consuming too many calories and not enough variety** of nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, beans, low-fat dairy, nuts, and seeds **can lead to vitamin, mineral, or protein deficiencies**.
- In the U.S., this is commonly seen in the hunger and overweight paradox, which **occurs mostly in food insecure, impoverished areas**.

Senior Malnutrition Facts:

- 1 out of 2 older adults is at risk for malnutrition or is already malnourished.
- 16% of independent older adults are at high risk for malnutrition.
- Up to 60% of older adults in health care settings are malnourished.
- 9 million older adults cannot afford nutritious food.
- 1 in 4 adults (25%) aged 65 years or older either reduces meal sizes or skip meals.
- Tooth loss, poor dental health, loss of appetite, and changes in taste, which are a natural part of the aging process, are contributing factors to malnutrition.

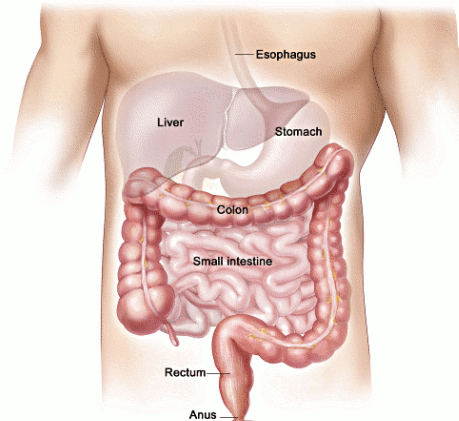
Malnutrition Can Result from a Variety of Factors

Malnutrition affects more individuals than just people with a low income or those that are homeless. It can also affect people that have a great support system and family that cares for them.

Even active and independent seniors that have plenty of food in their home can still be at risk for malnutrition! Having enough money and eating three balanced meals every day does not prevent someone from becoming malnourished.

Factors that may cause or contribute to malnutrition:

- Chronic health conditions
- Gastrointestinal disorders (e.g ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, celiac disease)
- Limited income
- Depression
- Trouble swallowing/chewing
- Changing taste buds
- Poor dental health
- Dementia
- Lack of mobility
- Restricted diets
- Living alone
- Medication side effects



As we age, our daily eating habits and activities change, which can affect our nutrition status. The body does not digest and metabolize food as efficiently as it used to. Changes in taste bud receptors and reduced appetite affect what and how much of foods are consumed. You can't always prevent or treat malnutrition just by eating more food.

Tips to Help Prevent Malnutrition:

- If you are on medications that decrease your appetite, ask your doctor if there are other options that do not contribute to poor appetite.
- Eat a variety of foods that provide nutrients such as potassium, calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12 or consume foods that are fortified with vitamins and minerals (e.g. cow's milk, fruits, vegetables, tuna, salmon, turkey, whole grains).
- Engage in types of exercise that are appropriate and enjoyable for you to help maintain/build muscle mass (Note: always check with your doctor to see what types of exercise are appropriate for you and safe to do based on your health).

September is National Whole Grains Month

A variety of foods made from wheat, oats, rice, barley, cornmeal, and other cereal grains are considered grain products.



Grains can be divided into two subgroups:

1. Whole grains

- Contain the entire grain kernel (the bran, germ, and endosperm).
- They are a good source of nutrients such as magnesium, zinc, B vitamins, and dietary fiber.
- They can spoil quicker than refined grains due to the oils that are naturally present in whole grains.

2. Refined grains

- Have gone through a milling process, which removes the germ and bran.
- The milling process improves shelf life.
- No longer have the iron, dietary fiber, and many of the B vitamins that were present in the “whole” grain before it was milled.

What counts as a one-ounce equivalent of grain, bread, or bread alternative?

- 1 slice (1 ounce), whole grain or enriched bread
- ½ cup cooked whole grain or enriched pasta or noodles
- 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal (flakes or rounds) or 1 ¼ cups puffed
- 1 small muffin (2 ½” diameter) or 2 mini muffins
- 1 small piece cornbread (2 ½” X 1 ¼” X 1 ¼”)
- 1 small biscuit (2” diameter)
- 1 slice French toast
- ½ slice French toast from “Texas toast”
- ½ English muffin
- 1 small flour or corn tortilla (6” diameter)
- 1 pancake or waffle (4 ½” diameter)
- ¼ large bagel or mini bagel
- ½ of a hamburger or hotdog bun
- ½ cup cooked cereal (e.g. oatmeal, cream of wheat)
- 5 - 100% whole wheat crackers or 7 square (saltine type) or round (snack crackers)
- 2 graham cracker sheets (2 ½” x 5”)
- ½ cup bread dressing/stuffing
- ½ cup cooked (1 ounce, dry) brown, wild or enriched white rice



Note: Grain/bread alternates do not include starchy vegetables such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, yams, or plantains. These foods are included in the vegetable food group.

It is important to include a variety of grains in your diet, especially whole grains due to their superior nutritional content and health benefits.

People that eat whole grains as part of a healthy eating pattern have a reduced risk of certain types of chronic diseases.

Top Benefits of Consuming Whole Grains:

- Reduced risk of heart disease
- Better weight maintenance
- Reduced risk of type 2 diabetes
- Lower risk of colorectal cancer
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Less inflammation



Seniors should aim for at least three ounces of whole grains each day (this is in line with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*).

Whole Grain Swaps

Swap This:	For a Whole Grain Option:
White Rice	Brown Rice, Bulgur, Wild Rice or Quinoa
White Pasta	Whole Grain Pasta
Muffin	Slice of 100% Whole Grain Toast or Whole Grain English Muffin
Traditional Pizza Dough	Whole Wheat Pizza Crust
1 Cup White Flour	½ cup White + ½ Cup Whole Wheat Flour (when baking)
1 Cup White Flour	Replace 1/3 of White Flour in a Recipe with Quick Oats/Old-Fashioned Oats

Attachments:

- A Guide for Adults – How to Spot Malnutrition (ASPEN)
- 5 Facts about Malnutrition
- Ask About Your Nutrition - Malnutrition Awareness Week - (PDFs in English; Spanish; Simplified Chinese; Traditional Chinese) other languages available on ASPEN’s site
- Self MNA ® Mini Nutritional Assessment for adults 65 years and older
- Whole Grains Defined (ONE – Oldways)
- How Much Whole Grain is Enough (ONE - Oldways)
- Will the Real Whole Grains Please Stand Up (ONE – Oldways)
- September Recipes: Brown Rice with Sizzling Chicken and Vegetables; Pasta E Fagioli

References:

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<https://www2.illinois.gov/aging/CommunityServices/nutrition/Pages/nutrition.aspx>