

How to Spot and Talk About Symptoms That Could Mean You're Malnourished

Poor nutrition and eating problems can put you at risk of being malnourished. Malnutrition threatens your health and your ability to recover from injuries or illnesses. That's why it is important for you to know what symptoms to look for and when you need to address them.

If you were recently hospitalized, been given directions regarding your diet, or been told you need a bit more nourishment, it is particularly important that you keep, follow, and share this information with those who care for you.



What You Need to Watch For

Since malnutrition may not be immediately apparent, you need to watch for, write down, and talk about any changes you notice in:

- Your appetite
- How much food you eat
- Your bowel habits
- Your weight
- Your daily activity levels
- Swelling in your belly, legs, ankles, and feet



You're doing OK if you can say: *"I feel good. I eat three meals a day and have the energy to do what I want."*

When You Need to Be Concerned

If you notice any of the following warning signs, you need to discuss them with your healthcare provider:

- Sudden loss or decrease in appetite
- Eating less than 75% of a normal meal for more than a week
- Episodes of nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea for more than three days
- Unplanned weight loss greater than 10 pounds
- Decrease in activity level



Schedule an appointment if you find yourself saying: *"I haven't wanted to eat anything since I started this new medication..." "I'm not finishing my meals like I used to..." "My stomach has been upset for days..." "My clothes don't seem to be fitting like they had been..." "I don't have any energy..."*

When You're in Danger from Malnutrition

The following are dangerous signs that you could be malnourished:

- Eating half as much as you normally do for more than a week
- Persistent nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Sudden and rapid weight loss with noticeable muscle and/or fat loss
- Swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or belly
- Feeling confused or having increased memory loss



Act immediately if you find yourself saying: *"It's been over a week and I can hardly eat a bite..." "I can't stop going to the bathroom..." "My feet and ankles are swollen..." "I can't concentrate when my family is talking to me ..."*

Keep Watching and Keep Talking

Don't take changes in your nutrition for granted. Be aware of what you may have been thinking or saying about how you've been eating and how you've been feeling. Share your conversations and symptoms with your healthcare provider. **Don't wait for them to ask!**

You're at the Highest Risk If...

You need to be constantly watchful for the warning signs of malnutrition if you are 85 years old or older. A number of acute or chronic diseases also put you at a much higher risk. Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider if you suffer from any of the following:

- Injury or Trauma
- Any diseases requiring multiple medications
- Cancer
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Kidney or Liver Disease
- Gastrointestinal Dysfunctions such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease
- Depression or Dementia

Visit the Malnutrition Solution Center

Take advantage of the valuable information and free resources that can help you, your family members and caregivers identify and understand malnutrition available at nutritioncare.org/malnutrition.

Here you can:

- Learn from the true-life stories of patients who've suffered from malnutrition
- Download nutrition tips and helpful posters on spotting malnutrition in children and adults
- Learn about other resources for older adults, including links to local Meals on Wheels programs

This information is adapted from a video presented by Angela Newton, MBA, RD, and the ASPEN Malnutrition Committee. The video and other resources on malnutrition can be found at nutritioncare.org/malnutrition.

Tips for Proper Nutrition and Staying Healthy



Eat **three balanced meals every day** that include protein and fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole grains

Stay hydrated with fluids (8 cups per day for most adults)



Follow your **healthcare provider's or dietitian's orders** for any diet restrictions including fluids

Know your **bowel habits** (frequency and consistency)



Check your weight weekly and write it down