



Healthy Eating Tip

Preventing Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a physical condition of unbalanced nutrition that should be addressed quickly and comprehensively. When most people think of malnutrition, they usually picture undernutrition, which can be caused by a lack of calories, protein or other nutrients. Malnutrition is when your body doesn't get enough nutrients from the foods you eat in order to work properly. Nutrients include fats, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins, and minerals. These substances give your body energy, and help your body grow and repair tissues. They also regulate bodily functions such as breathing and your heartbeat.

Overnutrition, also a condition of malnutrition, comes from eating too many calories. Someone can eat more calories than their body needs and be malnourished at the same time. They may not be eating enough nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, beans, low-fat dairy, nuts and seeds. This can result in vitamin, mineral or protein deficiencies.

Malnutrition in children and older adults is more common than you may think. Approximately 1 in 10 U.S. households with children struggle with food insecurity and 20 million children under the age of 5 are severely malnourished worldwide. Malnutrition in children, especially young children, can lead to stunted growth, developmental delays and more sickness due to poor immune function. Malnutrition in older adults is also a growing concern as the U.S. population ages, and in particular those with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Approximately 14 percent of nursing home residents and upwards of 50 percent of rehab facility patients are malnourished. This can lead to a number of health problems including unintentional weight loss, fatigue, muscle weakness, depression, a weakened immune system, anemia, and even memory problems (if not yet diagnosed).

Clinical malnutrition is when a hospital patient becomes malnourished. Estimates of adult malnutrition range from 15 percent to 60 percent of hospitalized patients. Someone in the hospital may not be getting enough nutrition because their body requires more nutrition than usual or they are not able to absorb the nutrients they eat.

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Malnutrition also can be the result of an eating disorder, organ failure or severe infection or physical trauma such as a head injury.

Strategies for Improved Nutrition

Use the following tips to help maintain good nutrition and prevent malnutrition:

Consult a Physician. Anytime there may be a potential issue for malnutrition, always consult with a physician. He/she may recommend supplementation and/or additional testing to ensure no other underlying conditions may exist.

Encourage healthier food choices. Start by ensuring that most meals and snacks are nutrient-rich. The best foods are those that are full of nutrients, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats. Try to limit intake of solid fats, sugars, alcoholic beverages, and salt. Replace less healthy foods with healthier choices.

Examples include eggs, peanut butter and other nut butters, bean soups, hummus and reduced-fat or full-fat milk, yogurt and cheese. Whole-wheat bread and pasta; mashed, baked or oven-roasted potatoes; sweet potatoes; corn; and hot cereal are excellent carbohydrate choices. Prepare hot cereal with milk or soy milk instead of water for added calories and nutrients. Add in healthy fats such as nuts, seeds and avocados. Try adding nuts and seeds to cereal, salads, pasta and vegetables. Add avocado slices to sandwiches, burgers and salads or as a topper for scrambled eggs. Sauté or stir-fry vegetables, meat, chicken and fish in olive or canola oil.

Snacking on healthy foods is a good way to get extra nutrients and calories between meals. When planning snacks, look for nutrient dense snacks that taste great, such as trail mix, hummus and whole grain crackers, or full fat yogurt.

Be Creative. Use online resources to find new recipes and snacks to add variety to meals and snacks. Trying new foods or ways to prepare foods may help improve nutritional status.

Encourage exercise. Even a little bit of exercise can help improve your loved one's appetite and keep his or her bones and muscles strong.

Make Mealtime Pleasant. Along with eating these foods, work to make mealtimes pleasant and not rushed. Involve your loved one in meal planning. Activities such as shopping and food preparation can encourage their interest in food and eating.



Sources:

www.eatright.org

www.familydoctor.org