



Therapeutic Nutrition Benefits for Caregivers and Mature Workers

Identifying Nutrition Problems and Finding Solutions

Poor nutrition is a common problem in older adults and those with chronic diseases. Poor nutrition can happen because of poor eating habits or loss of appetite. It can happen because someone cannot buy, shop for or prepare nutritious food or someone eats alone most of the time.

Poor nutrition can also result from an ongoing illness or medical treatment. It is important to prevent and treat poor nutrition because it can lead to more medical complications and hospital readmissions. This is not good for you or your loved one because greater health problems can make it more difficult to balance your role as a caregiver with your work.

Step 1: Alert the doctor to nutrition problems

As a caregiver, you can help determine when your loved one's limited interest in food and eating is a more serious problem that needs attention. The two biggest warning signs of poor nutrition are:

- Eating poorly
- Unplanned weight loss (recent weight loss without trying).

These warning signs should be talked about every time someone is admitted to a hospital or other healthcare facility. Make sure the doctor or nurse knows right away if your loved one has been eating poorly and/or has lost weight recently.

Other things that can alert you to a possible nutrition problem are:

- Chewing and swallowing difficulties
- Taking multiple medicines (often affect appetite)

Again, talk to the doctor or nurse if your loved one has these problems.

Step 2: Ask for a nutrition assessment

In the hospital or other healthcare setting, patients who are identified as having a nutrition risk sign (because of problems like those listed above) should be seen by right away by a registered dietitian for a comprehensive nutrition assessment and development of a nutrition care plan. If this does not happen, ask the doctor for a consult with a registered dietitian.

A comprehensive nutrition assessment looks at the patient's diseases and medical history, including changes in weight, diet, and potential digestive issues. The nutrition assessment also looks for physical signs of nutrition problems, like loss of muscle or more limited ability to move about and take care of oneself.

Step 3: Ask for a nutrition care plan

After the nutrition assessment finds specific nutrition issues, the dietitian develops a nutrition care plan about how to improve your loved one's nutritional health. If this does not happen, ask for it. Request specific ways to help your loved one eat better and regain their weight or prevent further weight loss.

Ask for ideas of what can be done in the hospital, as well as what you can do at home to improve their nutrition and help speed recovery.



Step 4: Consider therapeutic nutrition

Therapeutic nutrition — or the use of specific nutrients and food products in the right quantity to help manage a health problem — is a good way for you to care for the health of a loved one. Therapeutic nutrition cannot prevent health problems, but it may help reduce complications, hospital stays, and the need for more expensive medical care. It can be used by itself as recommended by a doctor or registered dietitian, or along with other medical care.

