

Therapeutic Nutrition Benefits for Caregivers and Mature Workers

Therapeutic Nutrition Tips if You Have Been Hospitalized or are Recovering from a Medical Treatment

Nutrition is one of the most basic needs. When you are sick, your body needs extra nutrition as fuel. If you do not have enough fuel, your body may break down the protein in your muscles and use that as fuel. This can leave you feeling weak and lead to weight loss, which can:

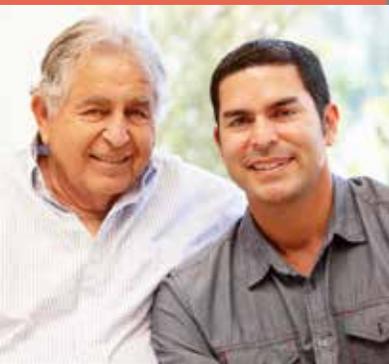
- Make it harder to recover from surgery and disease;
- Make it more difficult to heal wounds;
- Increase risk for infection;
- Increase risk for falls; and
- Decrease strength needed to take care of yourself or your loved one.

If you are recovering from a hospitalization or illness, consider the potential need for therapeutic nutrition. Therapeutic nutrition is the use of specific nutrients and food products in the right quantity to help manage a health problem. It provides fuel to help keep muscles strong and help speed recovery. Therapeutic nutrition cannot prevent health problems, but it may help reduce medical care, complications, and hospital stays.

In the Hospital

Be sure to talk to the doctor, nurse, or registered dietitian (RD) about any special nutrition needs you may have and how therapeutic nutrition can help recovery. You can also request a nutrition screening and assessment to help identify specific nutrition problems.

- Often, when you are in the hospital for surgery or other medical treatments, you may not feel up to eating very much. But a poor appetite will not help your recovery. And this is not the time for you to lose weight-particularly since the weight loss is often muscle, not just fat!
- If you are losing weight, talk to your doctor right away and try to identify why you are losing weight.
- Therapeutic nutrition can help other treatments work better and may cut down on the length of hospital stays and reduce costs. Some therapeutic nutrition products are created by nutrition specialists to help in the dietary management of specific health problems, like cancer, kidney and lung disease, and other conditions. Be sure to talk to your doctor or registered dietitian for more information.
 - Maybe medications or medical therapies are decreasing your appetite or digestion. Ask what changes can be made to help stimulate appetite and help with digestion.
 - Can you easily chew and swallow? Talk to a dentist about how to treat mouth pain or chewing problems. Ask for a referral to a speech pathologist to help with swallowing problems (often called dysphagia)
 - Special diets needed to help treat chronic disease or medical problems may be limiting the foods you really like to eat. Talk to the registered dietitian about how your special diet can be adapted to include foods you most enjoys



- Are there therapeutic nutrition products like Ensure or Ensure Plus that can be taken between meals to help increase nutrition?

At Home

- What you eat often affects how your body responds to treatment, so it is important to plan for your nutrition.
- At home, since you will not be seeing a doctor as often, be alert for signs of nutrition problems like the following and be sure to talk to your doctor or health care professional when they occur:
 - Eating poorly;
 - Change in appetite or digestion (may occur because of taking multiple medicines);
 - Chewing and swallowing problems; and
 - Weight loss: You may first notice this when your clothes no longer fit.
- When you first arrive home from the hospital, it may be difficult for you to shop for and prepare food. Also, you may not have the strength or appetite to eat very much at a meal. Here are tips to help increase your nutrition:
 - Reach out to a loved one or friend to help you plan for small meals and snacks (don't forget bedtime snacks) that are packed with nutrition-make sure everything you eat has plenty of calories and protein.
 - Try eating your favorite foods; eat something, even if just a few bites at a time.
 - Try not to have a lot of diet restrictions, if possible (talk to your doctor or registered dietitian).
 - If you need to eat bland foods, give them flavor with spices.
 - Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
 - Take therapeutic nutrition products, like Ensure or Ensure Plus, which can help supplement meals.
 - Try to be active every day if possible; this will help increase your appetite.
 - Ask family/friends to join you for meals-they can encourage you to eat and make mealtime pleasant by having someone to talk with.
- As you recover at home, your family/friends may not always be there to help with meals. Here are some tips so you can continue to get good nutrition:
 - Ask them to help shop for foods that are easy to prepare yet still packed with nutrition. It may be helpful to have them stop by once a week or so with food.
 - Stock up on therapeutic nutrition products, like Ensure or Ensure Plus, which can help supplement meals
 - Consider hiring outside help: home health aides can shop for food and prepare meals.
 - The Eldercare Locator connects you to local services including home-delivered meals, transportation, community centers, etc., for older adults and their families. **1-800-677-1116** (toll-free) or <http://eldercare.gov/>.

