



Therapeutic Nutrition Benefits for Caregivers and Mature Workers

Therapeutic Nutrition Tips for Your Loved One to Help Recovery

Nutrition is one of the most basic needs. When a loved one is sick, their body needs extra nutrition as fuel. If they do not have enough fuel, his/her body may break down the protein in muscles and use that as fuel. This can leave your loved one 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 a loved one is 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 and is a good way for you to help care for the health of a loved one. 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 and how therapeutic nutrition can help your loved one recover. You can also request a nutrition screening and assessment to help identify specific nutrition problems.
- Often, when your loved one is in the hospital for surgery or other medical treatments, he/she may not feel up to eating very much. But a poor appetite will not help recovery. And this is not the time to lose weight—particularly since the weight loss is often muscle, not just fat!
- If your loved one is losing weight, talk to the doctor right away and try to identify why your loved one is losing weight.
 - Maybe medications or medical therapies are decreasing your loved one's appetite or digestion. Ask what changes can be made to help stimulate appetite and help with digestion.
 - Can your loved one 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 your loved one really likes to eat. Talk to the registered dietitian about how your loved one's special diet can be adapted to include the foods he/she most enjoys
 - Are there therapeutic nutrition products like Ensure or Ensure Plus that can be offered between meals to help increase nutrition?
 - 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 loved one's doctor or registered dietitian for more information.



At Home

- What your loved one eats often affects how his/her body responds to treatment, so it is important to plan for your loved one's nutrition.
- At home, your loved one 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 loved one's 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 loved one's clothes no longer fit.
- When your loved one first arrives home from the hospital, it may be difficult for him/her to shop for and prepare food. Also, your loved one may not have the strength or appetite to eat very much at a meal. Here are tips to help increase his/her nutrition:
 - Plan small meals and snacks (don't forget bedtime snacks) that are packed with nutrition-make sure everything your loved one eats has plenty of calories and protein.
 - Offer favorite foods and encourage him/her to eat something, even if just a few bites at a time.
 - Prepare and offer foods that are at the right consistency and temperature and look appealing.
 - Try to not have a lot of diet restrictions, if possible (talk to your loved one's doctor or registered dietitian).
 - If you need to offer bland foods, give them flavor with spices.
 - Encourage drinking plenty of water and other fluids.
 - Offer therapeutic nutrition products, like Ensure® or Ensure Plus®, which can help supplement meals.
 - Encourage daily activity and exercise if possible; this will help increase appetite.
 - Arrange company for meals-you or someone else can offer conversation and encouragement to eat.
 - When you are not there, make sure that the available food is easy to eat and prepare.
- As your loved one recovers at home, you may no longer always be there to help with meals. Here are some tips to continue to provide good nutrition:
 - Shop for foods that are easy to prepare yet still packed with nutrition.
 - Make sure packaging is easy to open.
 - Provide 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/>.

