



Therapeutic Nutrition Benefits for Caregivers and Mature Workers

Benefits of Therapeutic Nutrition for Working Family Caregivers

Nutrition is important for people of all ages. However, older adults and loved ones who are chronically ill are especially at risk for poor nutrition. Poor nutrition can happen because of poor eating habits or loss of appetite and decreased access to good or nutritious food because of limited mobility, money, or time. It can also result from ongoing illness or medical treatments.

Poor nutrition increases your loved one's risk for serious health problems

For older adults and those battling serious illness or chronic disease, poor nutrition or malnutrition can result in the loss of muscle and other tissue, 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 one's self.

When these things occur, they can lead to longer stays in the hospital or rehabilitation facility and readmission back to the hospital. This is not good for you or your loved one. These increased health problems can also make it more difficult to balance your role as caregiver with your work.

Warning signs of poor nutrition are common

Unfortunately, poor nutrition is common in older adults and those with chronic disease. 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. Warning signs of poor nutrition include:

- Eating poorly;
- Chewing and swallowing difficulties;
- Taking multiple medicines; and
- Unplanned weight loss.

Therapeutic nutrition can help treat poor nutrition. You will find some information below, more guidance—including nutrition screening tools and tip sheets—is included in other sections in this toolkit. You can also talk to your loved one's doctor or registered dietitian (RD) for more help.

Therapeutic nutrition helps your loved one heal

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 benefit you too, because if your loved one has fewer health problems, it may be easier for you to balance your role as caregiver with your work.



Therapeutic nutrition works by making sure that the body gets the balanced mix of nutrients it needs to fight an ongoing health problem. It can be used by itself as recommended by a doctor or registered dietitian, or along with other medical care.

When someone is sick, their body needs extra nutrition as fuel. If they do not have enough fuel, their body might break down the protein in their own muscles and use that as fuel. This can leave them feeling weak and less able to fight infection. Therapeutic nutrition provides fuel to help keep their muscles strong and help them recover more quickly.

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.

Therapeutic nutrition is an area where you can help take charge

Nutrition is a part of your loved one's health, that you as a caregiver can help manage. What your loved one eats affects how their body responds to medical conditions, hospitalizations, and treatments. You want the best for your loved one, and that includes making sure that they are well nourished. A recent study found that eating a good diet with high amounts of fruits and vegetables and low amounts of saturated fat, as recommended for example in the DASH Eating Plan (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/>) were the most common health habits of centenarians (those who live to be 100 years and more).¹

A healthy diet will help their body stay stronger and this may make your role as caregiver easier. Educating yourself about the nutritional side of a health problem is the first step. The different nutrition information we hear every day can be confusing. It can be hard to separate fact from trend. Like most people, you may have questions about how therapeutic nutrition works. This program can help and gives you lots of specific information. Be sure to talk to your loved one's doctor or registered dietitian for more information too.

Reference

1. Vasto S, Rizzo C, Caruso C. Centenarians and diet: what they eat in the Western part of Sicily. *Immun Ageing*. 2012;9:10.

