

What is Malnutrition?

Malnutrition is a state of poor nutritional health. This could be a deficiency of nutrients (undernourished) or an excess of nutrients (over-nourished). Malnutrition is one of the greatest health risks faced by older adults and can lead to unwanted health outcomes. However, malnutrition is treatable with adequate assessments, monitoring, and resources in place.

Risk Factors

There are many risk factors that can increase an older adult's risk for malnutrition. *Defeat Malnutrition Today*, a coalition of organizations and stakeholders working to defeat older adult malnutrition, recognizes four categories of risk factors: disease associated, social and mental health, function associated, and hunger and food insecurity. Below are risk factors within each category:

- Disease Associated
 - ▶ Diseases associated with poor diet (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, etc.)
 - ▶ Use of multiple medications
 - ▶ Medications that could cause decreased appetite
- Social and Mental Health
 - ▶ Social isolation
 - ▶ Depression
 - ▶ Dementia including Alzheimer's Disease
- Function Associated
 - ▶ Weakening grip
 - ▶ Digestive problems
 - ▶ Frailty
 - ▶ Limited ability to chew or swallow
- Hunger and Food Insecurity
 - ▶ Inadequate access to food
 - ▶ Living in a food desert
 - ▶ Limited income

Signs & Symptomsⁱ

It is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of malnutrition in older adults to ensure timely diagnosis and treatment. Screenings and intervention is the best way to ensure the overall health of older adults. Signs and symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite
- Unplanned/unexplained weight loss
- Feeling tired and weak
- Swelling and generalized fluid accumulation
- Loss of muscle mass
- Diminished functional status
- Increase illness
- Extended or unexpectedly long recovery time
- Irritability or depression

Recommendations

- Evaluate individuals for signs and symptoms of malnutrition.
- Utilize assessment tools to screen individuals for their risk of malnutrition and current nutritional status.
- Educate individuals on available resources to assist in nutritional needs.
- Advocate for malnutrition awareness and resources at the organizational, local and state level.
- Utilize the resources from Defeat Malnutrition Today, including the National Blueprint: Achieving Quality Malnutrition Care for Older Adults.
- Advocate for policies that support nutrition education and combat malnutrition in older adults.

Resources

Malnutrition Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defeat Malnutrition Today www.defeatmalnutrition.today/
Assessment Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mini Nutritional Assessment www.mna-elderly.com/forms/MNA_english.pdf• National Council on Aging www.ncoa.org/assessments-tools/malnutrition-screening-assessment-tools/
Nutrition Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nutrition for Seniors www.nutrition.gov/life-stages/seniors• Texercise www.texercise.com• National Council on Aging www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/food-and-nutrition/senior-nutrition
Food Assistance Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meals on Wheels Texas http://www.mealsonwheelstexas.org/• SNAP Texas www.yourtexasbenefits.hhsc.texas.gov/programs/snap• Area Agency on Aging 800-252-9240 or https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/long-term-care-providers/area-agencies-aging-aaa

For more information about how to promote healthy diets and combat malnutrition in older adults visit www.defeatmalnutrition.today/

Visit www.texercise.com

ⁱ Factors groups from Mordarski, B.A. & Hand, R.K. (2018) Patterns in adult malnutrition assessment and diagnosis by registered dietitian nutritionist. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietitian*, 13, 310-320.