

SUPPORTING SENIORS' NUTRITIONAL HEALTH

CAREGIVERS



Prevent & Detect
Malnutrition in Seniors

Recognizing Nutritional Problems in Seniors

Many seniors face inadequate nutrition. The effects of being undernourished or malnourished can be dangerous, so it is important to recognize signs of nutritional issues in aging loved ones.

Common Challenges to Seniors' Nutritional Health

Typically, nutritional issues are associated with poverty or illnesses. For seniors, however, some of the most common challenges include:

- Difficulty getting to grocery stores, carrying groceries, and putting them away
- Trouble with meal planning and remembering things in the kitchen
- Struggling with cooking, cleaning dishes, etc.
- Lack of hunger due to health problems, sadness, or loneliness
- Forgetting to cook, eat, or get groceries
- Fatigue leading to convenient, unhealthy food choices
- Problems with taste, swallowing, or digestion



Some challenges are unexpected. For instance, one study found a senior woman was unplugging her refrigerator at night because it was noisy. This made the food she was consuming unsafe and caused health problems for months.

(Public Health Post and NCBI)

Malnourished or Undernourished?

Seniors can be malnourished or undernourished. Knowing the difference can help you prevent and address nutritional issues.

Malnourishment is when the body does not receive the nutrients needed to maintain a healthy balance. Dietary changes may restore balance, such as eating more fiber or less sugar.

A body is undernourished when too few calories are consumed. This can be addressed simply by eating more.

(Merck Manuals)

Consequences of Nutrition Problems

Being undernourished or malnourished can:

- Weaken the immune system
- Cause fatigue
- Upset digestive processes
- Strain the heart and mind
- Lead to extreme weight loss
- Increase risk of death
- Increase risk of hospitalization
- Delay healing times

(Mayo Clinic)

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Signs of Nutrition Problems in Seniors

Recognizing some nutrition problems in seniors can be simple, but others are more complex.

Look for signs like these:

- Weight loss, whether slow or fast
- Lack of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling cold often
- Getting sick easily
- Wounds taking a long time to heal
- Mood changes or irritability

In extreme cases or when malnourishment is a problem, symptoms might include:

- Shakiness or lightheadedness
- Difficulty breathing
- Sunken cheeks and features
- Digestive trouble
- Hair and skin drying out

(Medical News Today)



Home Care Tip

Medications can also affect nutrition. If a senior is showing signs of nutrition problems, talk to a doctor and bring along a list of medications and health conditions.

(Family Doctor)