



Nutrition Wheel: Nutrition FAQ

The purpose of this sheet is to provide answers to some frequently asked questions about nutrition and undernutrition. The aim is to help support your use of the Nutrition Wheel and have effective conversations with people about their risk of undernutrition and what to do as a result.

What is undernutrition?

- Undernutrition is a form of ‘malnutrition’, which means ‘poor nutrition’
- Put simply, a person can become undernourished when they don’t eat enough of the right foods to keep them healthy
- We know there are about 1 in 10 people over 65 who are undernourished, underweight and/or are not taking in the right nutrients and calories to maintain their health
- Most people with undernutrition are living in their own homes

Why should I focus on undernutrition?

- Undernutrition has serious consequences because the body isn’t getting the right nutrition to work properly. Consequences include reduced ability to fight infections, reduced mobility, increased risk of falls, poor wound healing, more frequent hospital admissions and more frequent GP visits
- Undernutrition is not well recognised or treated in the community. With an ageing population, we need to improve how undernutrition is identified and treated
- Undernutrition costs the NHS far more than overweight / obesity. The NHS spends an estimated £19.6 billion on undernutrition (about 15% of the total expenditure on health and social care). In contrast, the NHS spend on overweight and obesity-related ill-health is estimated as £6.1 billion

How can I find out if someone is at risk of undernutrition?

There are several ways you can do this:

- Use the **Nutrition Wheel** – the Nutrition Wheel enables you to have a conversation with someone about their risk of undernutrition using key questions to guide you, identify whether they are at risk, enables you to provide simple advice and signposting to support the person. For more information on the Nutrition Wheel, please visit: <http://wessexahsn.org.uk/nutritionwheel>
- Use the **Patients Association Nutrition Checklist** – a paper version, which uses the same key questions as the Nutrition Wheel in order to identify whether someone is at risk of undernutrition and provides structured guidance on how to support someone, including space to document specific actions discussed and any follow up planned. For more information, please visit: <https://www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-launches-nutrition-checklist>
- Nutritional screening using a tool such as the **‘Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool’** – screening tools are usually used by trained healthcare professionals, but a self-screening version is available for you to use with someone or advise someone to use themselves. For more information, please visit: <https://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/>

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What is good nutrition?

- The Eatwell Guide (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>) is a visual guide to a healthy balanced diet. It includes healthy eating messages such as eating 5 portions of a variety of fruits and vegetables each day, and basing meals on starchy carbohydrates, e.g. bread, pasta, cereal
- There are many factors that can influence the nutritional needs of older people, e.g. ill health, medical conditions, social isolation, lack of mobility, depression. This means it is important to eat a varied diet (to provide essential vitamins and minerals), and enough food to meet energy (calorie) needs

What are calories?

- The amount of energy in an item of food or drink is measured in calories
- Our bodies need energy to keep up alive and our organs working normally. When we eat and drink, we put energy into our bodies
- Our bodies use up energy through everyday movement
- To avoid unplanned weight loss, the energy we put into our bodies must be the same as the energy we use for normal bodily functions and physical activity (to gain weight, we need to put more energy in that we use)

What is protein?

- Protein is an essential nutrient found in foods like meat, poultry, eggs, beans and dairy produce
- Protein is needed for growth and repair (e.g. wound healing) and is also used in numerous body functions, such as helping the immune system and making hormones

What is fat?

- Fat is also an essential nutrient. Fat is a source of 'essential fatty acids', which the body can't make itself. Fat also helps the body to absorb vitamins A, D and E
- It is found in many foods, e.g. dairy produce, meat products, biscuits, cakes, nuts, oils and spreads

What are carbohydrates?

- Carbohydrates are found in many foods and can be classified according to the number of sugar units that make up their structure. There are three types: sugars, 'complex carbohydrates' and fibre
- Sugars are simple carbohydrates. Examples include sucrose (table sugar), fructose (commonly found in fruit) and lactose (found in milk and yoghurt)
- Complex carbohydrates are starches which consist of many sugar units joined together. These are found in foods like rice, pasta and bread
- Fibre is not digested and is vital for good digestive health. Fibre is found in fruits, vegetables and starchy carbohydrates



What are vitamins and minerals?

- Vitamins are a diverse range of chemicals that are required in very small amounts for a variety of roles in the body. Examples include vitamin C which has a role in supporting the skin and immune system and vitamin D which enables calcium to be transported into the bone
- Minerals are substances required in small amounts for a variety of roles in the body. These include maintaining healthy teeth and bones, healthy blood and immune function. Examples include calcium, iron and zinc

Is the dietary advice highlighted on the Nutrition Wheel suitable for everyone?

- The dietary advice provided on the Nutrition Wheel can be adapted for anyone to follow to reduce their risk of undernutrition. If the person is on a special diet, the advice can be tailored to them, e.g. if the person is on a dairy-free diet, advice around increasing fat and protein intake from sources other than dairy can be suggested
- The Nutrition Wheel states that if the person has a special diet or a medical condition which may affect nutritional intake, they should be signposted to their GP or Practice Nurse for more information and clarification

Where can I go for more information about nutrition?

Topic	Online source	Website
Good nutrition	Age UK	https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/healthy-eating/
	British Nutrition Foundation: top tips for healthy ageing	https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/healthyageing/top-tips-for-healthy-ageing.html
	British Dietetic Association: healthy eating food fact sheet	https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/healthy_eating
Undernutrition	Wessex Academic Health Science Network	http://wessexahsn.org.uk/OPEN-toolkit
	Malnutrition Task Force	http://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/
	Malnutrition Pathway leaflets	www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers
	BAPEN self-screening tool	www.malnutritionselfscreening.org
	British Dietetic Association: malnutrition food fact sheet	https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/malnutrition