



THE ROLE OF GOOD
NUTRITION WHEN
CARING FOR SOMEONE



STAYING STRONG IS IMPORTANT

Food and water are essential for health. Good nutrition can help the body to maintain or improve strength, stay mobile and keep up independence, however illness and old age can put a strain on the body.

Many people, when living with a medical condition, recovering from an illness or operation, or even as they get older, may find they cannot eat as much as usual and sometimes lose weight.

During illness or recovery the body can be under increased stress and may need more energy, protein, vitamins and minerals, even if someone is less mobile.

These nutrients are essential to maintain weight, improve recovery and maintain independence, as well as helping to support the response to medical treatment.

WHAT IS GOOD NUTRITION?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining good health for us all. This includes eating foods from all the different food groups, to provide us with the nutrients we need.

Sometimes the person you care for can struggle to eat the right amounts of certain food groups. The eatwell guide shows the portions of the different food groups we need to eat each day to have a balanced and healthy diet. Based on the eatwell guide you should try to eat:

Plenty of starchy food

- Bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes and pasta are a good source of energy.
- Always choose wholegrain varieties where you can.

Plenty of fruit and vegetables

- Aim for five portions a day to provide you with a good source of vitamins and minerals. 1 portion is equivalent to: 1 apple, 1 medium banana, 1 handful of grapes, 150ml glass of unsweetened orange juice, dessert bowl of salad.

Some protein

- Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses.

Some milk and dairy foods

- Including cheese and yogurt; choose low-fat options if trying to reduce fat in your diet.

Limit the amount of foods high in fat or sugar

- Crisps, chocolate, sweets.

The amount that you need to eat of the different food groups will vary depending on how active you are and if you are trying to lose or gain weight.

For more information on the eatwell guide, visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>

For more information about eating well when you are caring for someone visit the Carers UK website carersuk.org/nutrition

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE BODY DOES NOT GET ENOUGH NUTRITION?

If the body is not provided with enough food over a period of time it could suffer from a nutrition gap, also known as 'undernutrition', which healthcare professionals may refer to as 'malnutrition'.

Anyone can become undernourished if they do not eat enough food, or if their body cannot use what is eaten effectively due to illness or a medical condition.

Certain groups of people may be at greater risk of undernutrition than others. These people may have signs, or symptoms such as:

- Lack of, or a poor appetite over a prolonged period — this can be due to pain, the side effects of treatment, feeling full too quickly, or just not feeling like eating.
- Having a large wound or pressure ulcer — this may mean the body needs more nutrition to help itself heal.
- Suffering from illness or disease — this may mean the body is more vulnerable and needs more nutrition, even if less mobile than before.
- Problems with walking and moving around — this may stop someone from shopping or being able to prepare or cook food.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

Some of the effects of being undernourished can include:

- Reduced energy and strength — having fewer calories (energy) and taking in less protein than needed can cause tiredness, which can affect everyday activities. Muscle tone and physical strength can also decrease.
- Unplanned weight loss — you may notice the person you care for has loose rings, or that they have dropped a dress or collar size. This is due to taking in less calories than the body needs.
- Weaker immune system — a poor nutritional intake may lead to a weaker immune system.

HOW CAN I HELP TO IMPROVE THE NUTRITIONAL INTAKE OF THE PERSON I CARE FOR?

If someone you care for is struggling to eat or is at risk of undernutrition — here are some practical tips to help improve their nutritional intake:

- Offer small, frequent meals and snacks every 2-3 hours.
- Avoid offering fluids with meals which may reduce how much food is eaten.
- Encourage the intake of foods that are high in calories and protein; for example, meat, fish, cheese, eggs, and full fat dairy products like yoghurt and cheese.
- Offer snacks such as biscuits, cakes, chocolate, nuts or crisps may be useful.
- Encourage getting some fresh air outside or sit by an open window prior to, or during, eating.
- Use smaller portions on a small plate as large servings may reduce appetite further.

WHAT HAPPENS IF FOOD IS NOT ENOUGH?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet plays a key role in keeping the body strong. Living with a medical condition, or recovering from an illness or operation, can put a strain on the body. It can be hard to get enough food at these times, which can weaken the body further.

WHAT IS MEDICAL NUTRITION?

Medical nutrition products are specialised foods designed to meet the nutritional needs of those living with a medical condition, recovering from an illness or operation, or those who have become weak and frail over time. They are often referred to as Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS) and are typically used for those who find it difficult to get adequate nutrition from a normal diet alone.

The nutritional composition of ONS is based on extensive scientific and clinical research, and in many cases its use is recommended in international and professional guidelines. Products are generally available in the form of a powder or liquid drink containing energy, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Medical nutrition products are usually prescribed by a healthcare professional and must be used under medical supervision.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORAL NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS AVAILABLE

ONS are available in a variety of formats and styles, including milkshake-, juice-, yogurt-, and dessert-style, as well as a variety of flavours to suit different taste preferences.

High protein, nutrient-dense, low volume ONS are sometimes recommended for those who are unwell or are recovering from illness. These milkshake style drinks can help make it easier to get the energy and nutrients needed, even if the person you care for has a small appetite or is not feeling well. Many people find it difficult to finish large volumes of drinks and a low volume ONS may be preferred in these cases.

If you have any questions about the use of medical nutrition products, please speak to your healthcare professional. Further information can be found at www.carersuk.org or by calling the Nutricia Resource Centre on 0845 250 1011.

SPEAK TO THEIR GP

If you are worried the person you are caring for is struggling with a normal diet, the practical tips within this leaflet can help improve nutritional intake with food. You could also ask a pharmacist whether a nutritional drink in a powdered format, such as Complan, available from supermarkets and pharmacies, is a suitable option alongside normal foods and drinks.

However, should you continue to be concerned about the nutritional intake of the person you care for, please speak to their GP or other healthcare professional about your concerns and whether medical nutrition is right for them.

Further information can be found at www.carersuk.org/nutrition, by calling the Nutricia helpline on 0845 250 1011.



ABOUT CARERS UK

HOWEVER CARING AFFECTS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, WE'RE HERE

As the UK's only national membership charity for carers, we're a supportive community and a movement for change.

We give expert advice, information and support.

We connect carers so no one has to care alone.

We campaign together for lasting change.

We innovate to find new ways to reach and support carers.

Visit our website to join us, support us or get information and advice on caring:

www.carersuk.org

Carers UK Helpline: **0808 808 7777**

(Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm)

advice@carersuk.org

ABOUT NUTRICIA

Nutricia Ltd specialises in the delivery of medical nutrition products and services for all who need it, spanning from the very young to the elderly. We supply high quality feeds, equipment and support services to patients and healthcare professionals. Through our Nutricia Homeward service we deliver feeds, feeding pumps, equipment and nursing care direct to patients' homes.



Carers UK is working in partnership with Nutricia Ltd to help improve understanding about nutrition and caring. The partnership provides carers with information and resources on nutritional care for both themselves and the person they care for.

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Carers UK includes Carers Wales, Carers Scotland and Carers NI — visit our website to find out more and get in touch: www.carersuk.org.

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