

Malnutrition

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What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition is a condition when we do not get enough of the nutrients from our diet in the right amounts. It relates to overweight and underweight. Being underweight can affect anyone, but it is more common for older adults, those living on their own or with an underlying health condition.

Signs that you may not be taking enough food include having a low weight or have noticed unexplained weight loss. A change to the way your clothes or jewellery fits is a sign that your weight is falling. A recent loss in appetite or low energy levels may also suggest malnutrition.

Malnutrition affects every part of the body. It can give rise to more GP visits, hospital stays, and more complications from illness and higher care needs.

The easiest and quickest way to identify if you or someone you care for is at risk of malnutrition is to use the [Patients Association Nutrition Checklist](#). This checklist also offers some helpful advice to help eating, drinking and making food.

If you have further concerns around your food intake or weight or need further advice please speak with your GP.

Malnutrition resources

- [Malnutrition | nidirect](#)
- [Your guide to making the most of your food \(March 2022\)](#)
- Nourishing drink ideas (dysphagia)
- [How to use oral nutritional supplements \(June 2023\)](#)
- [Substance misuse: regional guidance \(2023\)](#)

Palliative and end of life care

- [Guidance for appropriate prescribing of ONS](#)
- [When illness affects your appetite](#)
- [Palliative care leaflet regional \(2023\)](#)
- [Swallowing information for end of life care](#)

Vitamin and mineral supplements

Resource- could be used in other sections

[Supplements - BDA](#)

Vegetarian, vegan and plant based eating

[Vegetarian, vegan and plant-based diet - BDA](#)

Fluid intake

[Fluid \(water and drinks\) and hydration - BDA](#)

For professionals

The easiest and quickest way to detect malnutrition is to use the British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN) Malnutrition Universal Screening tool (MUST). This tool is available in a paper form or via an online calculator.

[Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool](#)

[‘MUST’ Calculator | BAPEN](#)

Free MUST training may be accessed via your trust teams or through the BAPEN portal using a HSCNI email address

[BAPEN e-Learning Portal | BAPEN](#)

Last reviewed

05 October 2026

Additional information

[Building a better way - Social Care Council launches new App - NISCC](#)

Related content

- [Healthy eating, physical activity and healthier weight](#)
- [Swallow awareness - Dysphagia](#)
- [Dysphagia - healthcare professionals](#)
- [Palliative and end of life care programme](#)