



SPEAKING TO YOUR GP
When you're concerned about
the nutritional intake of the
person you care for



GOOD NUTRITION IS IMPORTANT

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining good health for us all. Good nutrition can help the body to maintain and/or improve strength, stay mobile and keep up independence.

A loss of muscle strength and weakness can occur as part of the natural ageing process in the body. During times of illness, or when recovering from an operation or recent infection, the body can become even weaker. This can be either through the effects of the disease or illness itself, or as a result of its treatment. During these times, many people can also find it difficult to get all of the nutrition they need, which can result in unintentional weight loss. Unintentional weight loss and poor nutritional intake can lead to decreased energy levels, a weakened immune system and a further reduction in physical strength.

If the body is not provided with enough food over a period of time it could suffer from a nutritional gap, also known as 'undernutrition.' Healthcare professionals often refer to this as 'malnutrition'.

As a carer, you might notice that the person you care for has a lack of appetite, a noticeably reduced daily food intake or that they have started to lose weight. If you are worried, it is important to seek help from their GP.

This booklet aims to help prepare you to discuss the health and nutritional intake of the person you care for with their GP. It is a place for you to record their weight and food intake, which can be valuable in helping their GP to give you the advice and assistance needed to improve or maintain the nutritional intake of the person you look after.

MONITORING WEIGHT AND NUTRITIONAL INTAKE

There are a number of ways you can monitor the nutritional intake of the person you care for.

WEIGHT

Weight can be a good indicator of whether or not the person you care for is eating and drinking the right amounts.

It can be a concern if the person you look after is losing weight without trying to do so — especially if their weight was low to begin with. It can suggest they are not getting the nutrition they need and this can place them at risk of malnutrition.

If you are concerned that the person you care for is losing weight, it can be a good idea to weigh them regularly, at least once a month. You can use the table below to keep a record of their weight and take this with you when you speak to their GP.

Date	Weight		
	kg	st	lb
	kg	st	lb
	kg	st	lb
	kg	st	lb



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

In certain situations it may not be possible to obtain an accurate body weight. For example, you may not have access to scales, or the person you look after may be unable to move to the scales or stand on them without support. In these circumstances, there are other signs and symptoms that could suggest the person you care for is not meeting their nutritional needs.

If you notice any of the following it may suggest the person you look after has had some weight loss or is not getting the nutrients they need. It may be worth mentioning these to their GP.

- Clothing, rings, jewellery and/or dentures becoming loose
- Tiredness and/or loss of energy
- Reduced ability to perform normal tasks
- Reduced physical performance, for example, not being able to walk as far or as fast as normal
- Altered mood, depression
- Poor concentration
- Poor growth in children

FOOD DIARY

When you speak to their GP, they may ask you how much the person you care for is eating and drinking. It can be difficult to remember, and also difficult to know exactly what is enough. If you are concerned, keep a record of everything the person you look after eats and drinks over one to three days and take it with you when you see their GP.

It is important that you write down and describe all foods and drinks consumed by the person you care for in as much details as possible. This includes:

- The amount consumed, e.g. $\frac{1}{2}$ pint orange juice, 1 chicken breast (skin off), $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bran flakes
- The type of food consumed, e.g. semi-skimmed milk instead of just recording milk, brown bread instead of just recording bread
- How the food was prepared, e.g. stir fried, grilled, deep fried, boiled, stewed, etc
- The amount and type of fat used for cooking, e.g. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil, 2 tablespoons butter, 1 teaspoon vegetable oil, etc
- How they take their tea/coffee, e.g. with/without milk, with/without sugar (including how many sugars if applicable).

	Meal	Food Description
DAY 1 – DATE:	Breakfast Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Lunch Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Dinner Time:	
	Snack Time:	

	Meal	Food Description
DAY 2 – DATE:	Breakfast Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Lunch Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Dinner Time:	
	Snack Time:	

DAY 3 – DATE:	Meal	Food Description
	Breakfast Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Lunch Time:	
	Snack Time:	
	Dinner Time:	
	Snack Time:	

VOICING YOUR CONCERNS WITH THEIR GP

Step 1: Initial appointment.

Asking the following questions may help prompt their GP:

- Do you think the person I care for is eating enough?
- Why do you think the person I care for is losing weight, or why do you think they have lost their appetite?
- Is it possible for you, or someone in the surgery, to screen the person I look after for malnutrition?
- Do you think the person I care for needs to see a dietitian?

If their GP recommends managing the situation through diet or nutrition support, remember to ask:

- If I don't see an improvement, how long should I wait until I come back?

If their GP doesn't recommend any form of nutrition support, remember to ask:

- Is there anything I can do at home to help prevent the person I care for from losing weight/losing more weight or to help improve their appetite?
- Are there any over-the-counter products that I can buy that could help the person I care for?
- If the situation does not improve over time, when should I make an appointment to see you again? What signs should I look out for that may be important in monitoring progress?

GO TO STEP 2

Step 2: Follow up appointment.

If you don't see any improvement or continue to worry, make another appointment. Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- Explain that you have tried whatever their GP suggested and the person you care for is still not eating well and/or is losing weight. Ask what is the next step?
- If this has not been done previously, ask if it is possible for the GP, or someone in the surgery, to screen the person you look after for malnutrition
- Ask their GP if they think the person you care for needs to see a dietitian or needs further medical attention

If their GP recommends additional nutrition support, remember to:

- Ask for a variety of flavours or a starter pack if available, so that the person you care for can choose the ones that are right for them

If their GP doesn't recommend any additional nutrition support but you feel they should, remember to:

- Reinforce your concerns and show the change in weight or typical diet. State that the strategies tried so far have not worked and ask what else the GP can recommend
- Ask for a referral to a dietitian
- If their GP's advice is to monitor the situation for now, ask how long you should wait before returning for another appointment if nothing changes

Step 3: Return to GP.

If you still don't see any improvement or continue to worry, return to their GP and request a referral to a dietitian:

- Keep a weekly record of the weight of the person you care for and take this to the GP if nothing improves. You could also keep a food diary (see page 4) alongside the weight record as this will help you explain what and how much they are eating on a daily basis
- Ask for a referral to a dietitian
- If no additional nutrition support or referral to a dietitian has been provided at this stage, you may want to ask their GP what the local policy is on managing malnutrition and whether they have a separate policy for prescribing medical nutrition

AS A CARER, YOUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT TOO

HEALTH CHECK-UPS

Caring for a friend or relative can be hugely rewarding, but at times it can also be tiring and stressful. Life might be very busy and your attention may be mainly focused on caring, but it is important to look after yourself and your own health needs too by attending appointments, check-ups and screenings.

If you have not seen your GP for some time, why not arrange a health check? This is likely to involve checking your blood pressure, weight and urine as well as a general discussion about your health. Your pharmacist can also help.

IF YOU ARE ILL OR HAVE HEALTH CONCERNS

Carers sometimes carry on regardless through coughs, flu, stomach upsets and worse. Don't put off seeing your GP if you feel faint or dizzy or have unexplained pains. Seeing your GP can ensure that the problem is addressed more quickly and effectively. Even with minor illnesses, try and take some time to rest. Your body will have a better chance of making a quick recovery and you will have less chance of the illness lingering on.

EATING WELL

As a carer, eating a balanced diet is essential to provide your body with all the nutrients it needs. A balanced diet will keep your body strong and give you enough energy to provide the best care for the person you are caring for and yourself.

For more information please see our booklet 'The importance of eating well for carers'.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FOOD IS NOT ENOUGH?

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 only available on prescription and they must be used under the medical supervision of a healthcare professional.

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.

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.

Carers UK

20 Great Dover Street
London SE1 4LX
www.carersuk.org

Nutricia Ltd

White Horse Business Park
Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 0XQ
www.nutricia.co.uk

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

This leaflet has been produced by Nutricia Ltd. The information in this leaflet is for guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law. The information is correct as of February 2016.

Carers UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX.

Date of preparation: March 2021

