

PATIENTS: A guide for signs that you may need nutritional help or extra nourishment and what to do next

Maintaining a healthy body weight is important for all adults, and especially in older age. If you have lost weight unintentionally, or you are underweight, you may feel weak and tired and unable to do the everyday activities you enjoy. Read on, because there are easy steps you can take to enable you to gain weight healthily or keep your weight steady and get the energy and nutrients you need.

This checklist is intended for adults and will guide you to recognise signs that you may need help. If you think you do, the checklist provides you with all the information and guidance you need to move forward.

- › Fill in Section A of the checklist to help you see whether you could do with some help with your diet because you are underweight or have lost weight without meaning to
- › If you answer 'No' to all the questions, you don't need to fill in any more
- › If you answer 'Yes' or 'Don't Know' to any questions in Section A, go to Section B
- › Section B will help you to assess your situation and needs. Here you will also find linked advice and guidance to help you take the next steps
- › Section C gives you next steps including suggestions on who to contact if you have concerns or need further help
- › Section D provides some useful sources of information to follow up if you want.

Patients, relatives, friends and carers are all welcome to fill in the checklist.

Your name: Date

Please note here who is filling in this checklist

Patient ☐ Relative, friend or carer ☐

Other ☐ (write in name and role)

.....



Section A: Initial assessment

Signs that you may need help or advice to gain weight or eat differently

Please put a tick in the relevant box to indicate your answers throughout the checklist

1. Are you or your family concerned that you may be underweight or need nutritional advice?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

2. Have you lost a lot of weight unintentionally in the past three – six months?

Yes ☐ Do you know why?

No ☐ Don't know ☐

3. Have you noticed that your clothes or rings have become loose recently?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

4. Have you recently found that you have lost your appetite and/or interest in eating?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

Did you answer 'No' to all these questions? There is no need to fill in the rest of this checklist, but you may find some of the information useful.

**Did you answer 'Yes' or 'Don't know' to one or more questions?
Please go to Section B**

Section B: Assessing your situation plus tips and ideas

B1 Food and eating

Which of the following apply to you? Please tick all that apply

- ☐ I am concerned that I am not eating enough of the right foods
- ☐ I am unsure what foods I should be eating
- ☐ I have a poorer appetite than before
- ☐ I don't really enjoy eating
- ☐ I often feel weak, tired and fatigued



Tips and ideas for food to help you eat well and gain energy

- › Eat small meals and snacks frequently
- › Eat foods that you enjoy
- › Have milky drinks between meals such as milk shakes, smoothies or hot chocolate
- › Avoid low calorie foods and drinks
- › Use full fat dairy products e.g., whole milk, full fat yoghurts and cheese. If you don't eat dairy products, try almond, oat or coconut milk
- › Fortify foods with extra calories and protein (e.g., add four tablespoons dried milk powder to a pint of whole milk to use in porridge, add cream cheese to mashed potato, add ground almonds or coconut cream to soups, use ghee in curries)
- › Pick quick and easy but nutritious meals like tuna, sardines or beans on toast with cheese, or puddings like cheesecake, rice pudding or vermicelli pudding
- › Use nutritional supplement drinks which you can buy at a supermarket or chemist, to help add protein, vitamins, minerals and calories. Ask your local pharmacist for advice.



There are plenty more ideas for recipes and eating in Section D: Further information.

Section B: Assessing your situation plus tips and ideas

B2 Physical issues

Which of the following apply to you? Please tick all that apply

- ☐ I am on a special diet or have a condition which impacts on my eating
- ☐ I am having difficulty swallowing
- ☐ Eating makes me cough
- ☐ I am having difficulty chewing food
- ☐ I am having difficulty cutting up my food

Eating makes
me cough

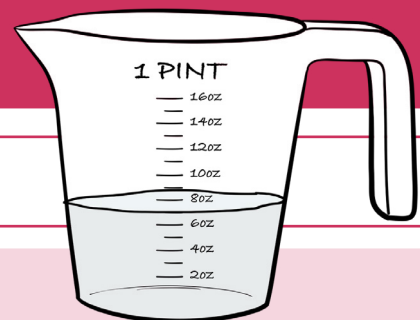


Tips and ideas if you are having difficulty cutting, chewing or swallowing food, or have a condition affecting diet

- › Eat softer foods, such as macaroni cheese or fish pie and milky drinks or finger foods
- › Please ensure you report any difficulty swallowing or coughing during eating to your healthcare professional, who can help you or refer you to a specialist
- › If you have a condition affecting your eating, talk to your healthcare professional about how to manage your diet
- › If you have difficulty chewing or your mouth is sore, you may find it helpful to see your dentist. If you need advice, you can contact the Oral Health Foundation dental helpline on **01788 539780**.

B3 Drinking

- ☐ I am finding it difficult to drink or drink enough



Tips and ideas to help you drink enough

- › Aim for eight drinks a day of 1/3 pint (large mug). All fluids count so choose your favourites including milky drinks, tea and coffee, diluted squash or food such as soup or custard
- › Drink regularly throughout the day. Have a drink with meals and snacks or if taking medication
- › If you are on thickened fluids and finding this difficult, make an appointment to see the speech and language therapist or other healthcare professional who suggested this diet.

Section B: Assessing your situation plus tips and ideas

B4 Social issues

Which of the following apply to you? Please tick all that apply

- ☐ I am concerned about being able to afford the food I need to eat
- ☐ I am concerned about my ability to shop for food
- ☐ I am concerned about my ability to cook meals
- ☐ I live alone

Tips and ideas if you have concerns about cooking or shopping

- › You may find it helpful to make use of local services available such as:
 - * Day centres and luncheon clubs
 - * Visiting schemes or befriending services
 - * Meals on wheels, i.e., hot or frozen ready-made meals delivered to your home
 - * Transport services
 - * Online shopping
- › You may be eligible for help including meals on wheels from social services so contact your local authority for advice
- › Contact Citizens Advice **0800 1448848** (England) or **0800 7022020** (Wales) or Age UK **0800 6781602** for information on local services and budgeting help
- › Feel free to write in local organisations which may help...



Section C: Next steps

Monitoring how you are doing

It is helpful to keep an eye on how you are doing, for example you could:

- › weigh yourself once a week and keep a record to see if you are losing weight over time
- › check your BMI (Body Mass Index) using the method described on the NHS website (www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight). Ask at your GP practice if you cannot access this information online, or you want to use their weighing scales
- › monitor your energy level, whether your clothes are fitting better, and if your appetite has improved.

Further help

We hope that the checklist has been useful to help you assess your needs and give you some practical ideas to help you move forward. If you have concerns or you need further advice please take the checklist to your GP, practice nurse or local dietitian. You may be offered:

- › advice on nutrition and eating
- › tests to check your weight and for causes of weight loss
- › a referral to a GP, nurse, dietitian or other specialist
- › recommendations for different food or food supplements, if appropriate
- › a referral to other local services.



Section D: Further information

If you have access to the internet, you can take a look at these resources. If not, you can ask your healthcare provider to print out what you want.

Patients Association www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-nutrition-checklist-toolkit for more information about the checklist

Malnutrition Task Force www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk with plenty of information on eating and drinking well

BAPEN www.bapen.org.uk for tools to check if you need nutritional help
www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/self-screening.html and recipe ideas
www.bapen.org.uk/nutrition-support/nutrition-by-mouth/food-first-project-leaflets

Eat Well Age Well www.eatwellagewell.org.uk, especially for those in Scotland, with interesting information and recipe ideas www.eatwellagewell.org.uk/images/EWAWEasyStoreCupboardRecipes.pdf

Carers UK website www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/nutrition for information on eating well particularly for people who are carers

The NHS UK website for information about malnutrition, advice and information
www.nhs.uk/conditions/malnutrition/ and ideas for maintaining weight in later life
www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/keeping-your-weight-up-in-later-life/

British Dietetic Association (www.bda.uk.com) for food fact sheets about eating healthily in older age, including 'Eat well, spend less', 'Healthy lunches': www.bda.uk.com/resource/malnutrition.html

Mind for help if you feel you need mental health support
www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/ and a section on food and mood:
www.mind.org.uk/media-a/2929/food-and-mood-2017.pdf

Thank you for filling in the checklist. We hope you have found it useful.

The Patients Association Nutrition Checklist was originally developed in 2018 in partnership with the Wessex Academic Health Science Network and has been hosted by the Malnutrition Task Force. Following input from patients, healthcare professionals and other key stakeholders, and with support through an unrestricted educational grant from Nutricia Ltd., the checklist has been updated by the Patients Association in 2021.