

Malnutrition and its Prevention

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Introduction:

Malnutrition occurs when an organism gets too few or too many nutrients, resulting in health problems. Specifically, it is "a deficiency, excess, or imbalance of energy, protein and other nutrients" which adversely affects the body's tissues and form.

Malnutrition is a category of diseases that includes under nutrition and over nutrition. Under nutrition is a lack of nutrients, which can result in stunted growth, wasting, and underweight. A surplus of nutrients causes over nutrition, which can result in obesity. In some developing countries, over nutrition in the form of obesity is beginning to appear within the same communities as under nutrition.

Malnutrition is an imbalance in dietary intake. It occurs when a person has too much or too little food or essential nutrients. A person with malnutrition may lack vitamins, minerals, and other essential substances that their body needs to function.

People may become malnourished if they do not eat enough food overall. However, people who eat plenty but do not have enough variation in their diet can also become malnourished.

Malnutrition can lead to:

- short- and long-term health problems
- slow recovery from wounds and illnesses
- a higher risk of infection

Some deficiencies can trigger specific health problems. For example:

Lack of vitamin A

Around the world, many children develop vision problems due to a lack of vitamin A.

Lack of vitamin C

- A lack of vitamin C can result in scurvy.

- Scurvy is rare in the United States (U.S.), but it can develop if a person does not have a varied diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables all contain vitamin C.
- People who are particularly at risk of scurvy include:
 - older adults
 - young children
 - those who consume a lot of alcohol
 - some people with certain mental health conditions

An overall deficiency

- Malnutrition can lead to marasmus, which is a severe form of malnutrition. Marasmus is a deficiency of protein and overall energy intake.
- A person with marasmus will have very little muscle or fat on their body.

Over nutrition

Over nutrition is another type of malnutrition. It occurs when a person takes in more nutrients than they need. The result may be an accumulation of body fat from the excess nutrients, resulting in overweight or obesity. Over nutrition has several health implications Trusted Source. People who have overweight or obesity are at greater risk of:

- heart disease
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- cancer
- high cholesterol

The rate of over nutrition is growing worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that in 2020, 5.7% of children under 5 were overweight, an increase from 5.4% in 2000.

In addition, the number of adults with obesity almost tripled Trusted Source worldwide from 1975 to 2016.

Causes of malnutrition

Malnutrition is a common health problem and occurs when you are not eating enough of the right foods or have a problem absorbing nutrients from food. This means you are not getting all the nutrients such as proteins, vitamins and minerals that you need.



Signs of malnutrition

- The most common symptom of malnutrition is weight loss.
- Being malnourished can make you ill, as your body needs the food as a fuel to make sure it functions properly. Being ill can also lead to malnutrition as this often leads to poor eating habits.

Other signs can include:

- increased risk of illness and infection
- slower wound healing
- increased risk of falls
- difficulty keeping warm
- low mood
- reduced energy levels
- reduced muscle strength

Preventing malnutrition

The best way to prevent malnutrition is to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Try not to miss or skip meals and aim to eat three small meals a day and two to three snacks a day if your appetite is poor. Take drinks after your meal, not before or during as that can fill you up.

A healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining health and fitness. To stay healthy, you need to eat a variety of foods from the four main food groups including:

- fruit and vegetables
- starchy foods, such as rice, pasta, bread and potatoes
- milk and dairy foods
- meat, fish, eggs and beans and other non dairy sources of protein

If your malnutrition (or your risk of malnutrition) is caused by an underlying health condition, you may have more complex dietary needs or you may need additional items in your diet such as nutritional supplements. The doctor in charge of your care will be able to advise you and refer you to a registered dietitian.

Conclusion:

Malnutrition is the result of an improper diet. It can result from too few nutrients (under nutrition) or too many nutrients (over nutrition).

People who experience under nutrition often have:

- low weight
- difficulty recovering from injuries
- lack of appetite
- fatigue
- depression
- among other symptoms

But malnutrition is not the result of poor diet choices in every case. Sometimes, malnutrition occurs because a person:

- does not have easy access to food
- cannot leave their home to buy food
- cannot cook meals
- has a digestive disorder that prevents their body from properly absorbing nutrients

Helping patients treat malnutrition is an important goal for many healthcare professionals. Together, a doctor and patient can review possible causes of malnutrition and help develop more nutrient-dense eating plans.