



**care  
about  
nutrition**

**care  
with  
nutrition**

## **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 and /or improve strength, stay mobile and keep up independence...

...but illness and old age can put a strain on the body.

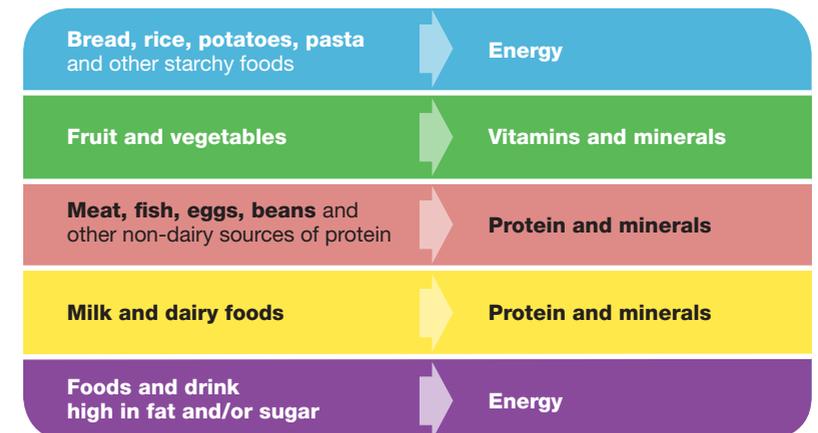
Many people, when living with a medical condition, recovering from an illness or operation, or even as they get older may find that they cannot eat as much as usual and sometimes lose weight.

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.



# 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', and 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 that the body needs more nutrition to help itself heal.
- Suffering from illness or disease - this may mean that 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 decrease.
- **Unplanned weight loss** – you may notice that the person you care for has loose rings, or they have dropped a dress or collar size. This is due to taking in less calories than the body needs.
- **Weaker immune system** – as the gut makes up a part of the 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:**

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



## What happens if food isn't enough?

Nutrition plays a key role in keeping the body strong but illness and old age can put a strain on the body. It can be hard to get enough food at these times, which can weaken the body further. The nutrition gap that follows can lead to health problems.

Medical nutrition has been specifically designed for those who find it difficult to get adequate nutrition from a normal diet alone. Medical nutrition is scientifically formulated liquid food that is available in the form of a drink containing energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. It is particularly helpful for those living with a medical condition, recovering from an illness or operation or those who have become weak and frail over time.

If you are worried that the person you care for is struggling with their normal diet, remember to use the practical tips within this leaflet to help improve their nutritional intake with food. You could also ask your pharmacist whether an over the counter product in a powdered format, such as Complan, is a suitable option, alongside normal foods and fluids. However, should you continue to struggle, please speak to your GP or other healthcare professional about the suitability of medical nutrition.

We hope you have found the information useful and we would be pleased to hear from you if you have any comments or questions. Visit our website at [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) or call our helpline **0845 2501011\***.

\*Helpline opening hours: 9am-5pm Monday – Thursday, 9am-4pm on Friday's.



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