

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

Maintaining a healthy body weight and not becoming too thin is important, especially in older age. If you are underweight, or have lost weight without meaning to, there are easy steps you can take to help you gain weight healthily or keep your weight steady and get the energy and nutrients you need.

This checklist gives a guide for signs that you may need help and if you find you do, it 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 to assess your situation and needs. Your answers will help anyone offering you advice.

They are also marked with symbols that link to self-help advice and guidance in Section D



- ▶ Understand the next steps to take to help you with diet, including who to contact (Section C)
- ▶ Find ideas, information and advice about diet and eating (Section D)

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

Your name:..... Date.....

Please note here who is filling in this checklist

Patient

Spouse, partner or relative

Section A: initial assessment

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

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

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 in Sections C and D useful.

Did you answer 'Yes' or 'Don't know' to one or more questions?

Please go to Section B 

Section B: Assessing your situation and needs

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

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



- I do not think I am 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



- I am finding it difficult to drink or drink enough



- I live alone
- I am concerned about my ability to shop for food
- I am concerned about my ability to cook meals
- I am concerned about food budgeting



Did you tick one or more boxes?

YES - it looks as if you may find some advice about diet useful. We suggest you go to Sections C and D for guidance on what to do next, including seeing a healthcare professional for advice. ►

NO - go to Section D for further information and if you have any concerns, follow the advice in Section D about seeing a healthcare professional.

Section C: Next Steps

Please take the checklist to your GP, Practice Nurse or local dietitian so they can look at it and assess your needs. You may be offered:

- ▶ advice on nutrition and gaining weight
- ▶ 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: Tips and ideas about eating

If you have difficulty cutting, chewing or swallowing food, or 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 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

If you are underweight, have lost weight unintentionally or have a poor appetite



- Eat small meals and snacks frequently
- Have milky drinks between meals
- Avoid low calorie foods and drinks, instead use full fat dairy products e.g. whole milk, full fat yoghurts and cheese to help build weight
- Fortify foods with extra calories and protein (e.g. adding four tablespoons dried milk powder to a pint of whole milk to use in porridge, adding cream cheese to mashed potato, adding ground almonds to soups)
- Pick quick and easy but nutritious meals like sardines or beans on toast with cheese
- Use supplement drinks (such as Complan, Meritene and Aymes Retail) which you can buy at a supermarket or chemist, to help add protein, vitamins, minerals and calories.

If you are finding it difficult to drink or drink enough

- Aim for eight drinks a day. All fluids count so choose your favourites including milky drinks, diluted squash or food such as soup or custard
- If you are on thickened fluids and finding this difficult, make an appointment to see the Speech and Language Therapist or other professional who suggested this diet.



If you have concerns about cooking or shopping for yourself

- You may find it helpful to make use of local services available such as:
- Day centres and luncheon clubs
- Visiting schemes or befriending services
- Transport services
- Meals on wheels, i.e. hot or frozen ready-made meals delivered to your home
- 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 for information on local services and budgeting help 03444 111 444

Monitoring your weight

It is helpful to monitor your weight by weighing yourself once a week and keeping a record to see whether you are losing a lot of weight over time. You may also want to check your BMI (or Body Mass Index) which is a recognised measure. There is a ready reckoner on NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) or on the BAPEN website which also has self-help tips (<http://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/self-screening.html>).

Ask at your GP practice if you cannot access this information online.

Useful sources of information

You can look at these if you have access to the internet:

'Managing Adult Malnutrition in the Community' Pathway (www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers) with many useful leaflets about eating and making the most of your food.

BAPEN website (www.malnutritionselfscreening.org) for tools to check if you need nutritional help and tips to help yourself.

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:

(www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/keeping-your-weight-up-in-later-life)

OPEN Undernutrition leaflet (Wessex AHSN) <http://wessexahsn.org.uk/open-leaflet.pdf>

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