



**Eating well,  
feeling good**

**Guidance if you have  
unplanned weight loss  
or are underweight**

## Why is 'eating well' important?

**Eating well is important for everyone.** It enables the body to get the right balance of nutrition to work at its best. Malnutrition means 'poor nutrition'. A person is 'malnourished' when they have not eaten enough (undernourished), or too much (overweight) of the right foods to stay healthy.

It can lead to illness because the body isn't getting the right nutrition to work properly.

**This booklet focuses on identifying and treating undernutrition.**



## What are the symptoms to look out for?

**If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the following, they could be at risk of losing weight or becoming underweight:**

- Underweight (Body mass index (BMI) less than 20)
- Unplanned weight loss
- Poor appetite or trouble finishing meals
- Eating less food or drink than usual
- Finding it hard to keep warm
- Poor concentration or irritability
- Loss of interest in food
- Withdrawal or loss of interest in clubs and activities
- Pressure ulcers or poor wound healing

### Spotting the signs of weight loss

- Shirt collars looser
- Thinner arms
- Belts and waistbands looser
- Shoes and slippers looser
- Jewellery looser or slipping off
- Looser dentures
- Thinner legs
- Clothes look too big

# Who is at risk?

Anyone can be at risk. This risk increases with age, but it should not be accepted as just being part of old age. There are many factors which can cause someone to lose weight or to be underweight:

## Social factors

- Isolation, loneliness
- Work and financial pressure
- Lack of cooking skills
- Difficulty shopping or preparing food
- Lack of knowledge about food and nutrition



## Psychological factors

- Confusion
- Anxiety and depression
- Bereavement

## Physical factors

- Poor appetite
- Illness, recent hospital stay
- Swallowing problems
- Memory loss
- Poorly fitting dentures
- Sickness, nausea and diarrhoea
- Loss of taste and smell
- Dementia



# If you're concerned about someone...

## You can:

- Encourage them to make an appointment with their Practice Nurse (or community nursing team if applicable)
- Share your concerns with health or social care workers involved in the person's care
- Check for signs of anxiety, depression or lack of interest in things they previously enjoyed
- Talk to them about eating and ask questions to open up the conversation, e.g. "Tell me what you had to eat yesterday?"
- If you are in the kitchen or making a drink, you could check the fridge and kitchen cupboards – this can give an idea of whether foods are fresh and within date, and whether there's a good variety of food
- Encourage snacks and milky drinks
- Support them to attend social events which include meals, such as lunch clubs

# Tips for eating more

Losing weight is not a natural part of the ageing process. If you are older and losing weight, the following eating guidelines may apply to you:



Eat **small, frequent meals and snacks**, instead of 3 large meals



Introduce **snacks** around your favourite TV programmes



**High calorie snack ideas** include thick and creamy yoghurts, cake, cheese and crackers and buffet foods



Eat foods **high in calories and protein**, e.g. full fat dairy products, meat and fish



Avoid 'diet' or 'low fat' products



Include nourishing drinks, e.g. whole milk, milky coffee, milkshakes, hot chocolate, malted drinks e.g. Ovaltine, Horlicks



Fortify food – add extra calories without increasing the food portion. Examples include adding cream to soups and casseroles, or adding butter and cheese to mashed potato



Fortify your milk and use this in place of usual milk



Consider joining a local lunch club

# Tasty drinks recipes

## Fortified milk

4 tablespoons milk powder

1 pint of whole milk

**Mix together**



### Banana milkshake

Small, ripe banana

Scoop of vanilla ice cream

1 cup of fortified milk

Teaspoon of honey

**Blend together**

## Yoghurt & Berry Smoothie

150ml whole milk

Small pot of Greek yoghurt

Handful of frozen berries

Small banana

**Blend together**

## Super Soup

Packet of cup a soup

200ml warmed whole milk

4 tablespoons milk powder

2 tablespoons double cream / grated cheese

**Mix together and serve warm**



### Fruit Blast

100ml fresh fruit juice

100ml lemonade

1 scoop ice cream

1 tablespoon sugar

**Mix together and serve chilled**

## Shop bought supplements

e.g. Complan, Meritene and Aymes Retail (made with whole milk)

## Where to go for help

If you or someone you know are concerned, it's best to seek individual advice from **your Practice Nurse** initially, unless you have a medical issue, in which case you should make an appointment with **your GP**. **Your community pharmacist** may also be able to provide support and advice.

**Your local community organisation** (e.g. Age Concern) and **the council** can also provide information, and a range of options to support you.



**Wessex**  
Academic Health  
Science Network

Email [healthyageing@wessexahsn.net](mailto:healthyageing@wessexahsn.net)  
for more information about malnutrition



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