

Malnutrition Treatment at Home

Malnutrition is when you do not get enough calories or nutrients to keep you healthy. Nutrients include protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals.

Causes of Malnutrition

Malnutrition can happen when you **do not** eat enough or when there is:

- A lack of variety in your diet.
- Decreased absorption of nutrients.
- An increased need for nutrients.

Both underweight and overweight people can be malnourished. It can be treated or reversed to help you improve your strength and well-being.

Malnourishment and Health

Being malnourished can affect your health. It can:

- Increase your risk of infection and decrease your ability to fight it off.
- Increase your risk of getting pressure ulcers and decrease your ability to heal them.
- Decrease your muscle mass. This can lead to weakness and makes it hard to do normal activities.
- Increase your hospital length of stay.
- Increase your risk for readmission.
- Increase your health care costs.

Signs of Malnutrition

- Poor food intake
- Weight loss without trying
- Loss of muscle mass
- Loss of fat stores
- Reduced strength

Ways to Increase Nutrition

- Eat small, frequent meals and snacks all day long.
- Schedule time to eat and follow it, **even if you do not feel hungry**. Set an alarm to remind yourself to eat every 3 to 4 hours, even if it is something small
- Plan your biggest meal of the day when you feel the best.
- Eat meals in a place that is nice and relaxed.
- Include a source of protein at every meal and snack. This includes meats, beans, tofu, eggs, nuts, milk, yogurt, cheese or protein shakes.
- Avoid low-calorie or low-fat food. Add fat and oils to foods to help increase calories.
- Drink fluids that give you calories, such as protein shakes, milk, juice, or smoothies.
- Drink most fluids between meals instead of with meals. Fluids can take up space in your stomach which can cause you to eat less.
- Take vitamins or minerals as directed.
- Talk to your doctor about an appetite stimulant.
- Work with physical therapy to help build strength and muscle mass.
- See your primary care doctor and a registered dietitian after you get home.

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please call us at one of the phone numbers listed below.

You can also visit our website at:

www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH)
(608) 890-5500

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF)
(608) 287-2770

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#611.