

# Nutrition and Illness



- Are you living with a medical condition or illness?
- Are you worried about eating enough or losing weight without trying?
- If so, you might be at risk of disease-related malnutrition.

This fact sheet explains what disease-related malnutrition is, how to recognise it, and offers patients and carers directions for further support.

## 1 What is disease-related malnutrition?

Disease-related malnutrition is poor nutrition due to a medical condition or illness.

- Living with a medical condition or illness can make it harder to eat, digest or absorb food.
- Having a medical condition or illness may mean you find it hard to get all the nutrients you need.

This can result in a lack or imbalance of energy, protein, or other nutrients (like vitamins and minerals), affecting the way the body works and its ability to recover. For some people, this may only become a problem during certain periods of a medical condition or illness.

## 2 Why is it important to know about disease-related malnutrition?

It can have serious consequences, such as:



Affect the way the body works



Affect recovery from illness



Cause weakness and frailty



Increase chance of infection



Cause wounds to heal slowly



Affect quality of life and mood

## 3 Who can it affect?

Anyone with a medical condition or illness may be at risk of disease-related malnutrition, even if you are overweight and normally eat well.



## 4 What are some of the symptoms or changes to look out for?

These signs or symptoms might mean you are at risk of malnutrition:



Losing weight without trying



Clothes are too big



Underweight or thin arms



Struggling To eat



Feeling weak or no energy



Poor wound healing



Hard to Keep warm

**Don't worry, here's what you can do...**

## 5 What can I do if I have these symptoms or changes?

If you have symptoms, or think someone may be at risk of disease-related malnutrition, please speak with your local GP surgery, pharmacist, or other healthcare professional.

They can give you advice or put you in touch with the right person to help, such as a practice nurse, nurse specialist, clinical pharmacist, or dietitian.

## 6 Some quick & simple online tools to help you:



Visit <https://www.patients-association.org.uk/improving-your-nutritional-health>, or scan the QR code for more information. Click the links below for online tools.

You can also ask someone to assist with accessing or printing the information.

- **The nutrition checklist** a conversation starter  
<https://www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-nutrition-checklist-toolkit>

- **Your risk of malnutrition** online tool  
<https://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/self-screening.html>