

Helping to Combat Malnutrition in Care Homes this Malnutrition Awareness Week

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Malnutrition is a serious condition that occurs when someone does not get the correct amount of required nutrients, which may be due to over-eating, under-eating or because of a clinical condition. Malnutrition is a significant issue within care homes with 55% of residents being at risk of malnutrition¹. Identifying the causes and providing treatment will not just have significant benefits to the individual but also those involved in their care, with good nutrition supporting some people to stay independent for longer. That is why UK Malnutrition Awareness Week, taking place 11th-17th November, was founded by the Malnutrition Task Force and BAPEN with an aim to raise awareness and understand the risks of preventable malnutrition.

Health Conditions

Residents in care homes often require extra support in their daily lives which may be due to a natural decline in physical ability or the consequence of a chronic health condition, such as dementia. Health conditions and/or treatments can negatively impact on resident's nutritional intake by reducing their appetite, affecting digestion or nutrient absorption. Experiencing poor nutrition secondary to a health condition can have grave consequences, including progression of disease and increased hospital admissions, if not identified and treated promptly.

Effective use of nutrition and hydration care plans enables carers to recognise if a resident's behaviour is out of character, particularly if they are not regularly caring for them. Screening tools are essential to care plans and provide a quick and simple



way to see changes. Malnutrition screening tools are an easy and effective way to assess and monitor a resident's nutritional status and provide clear management guidelines to ensure the resident receives the most appropriate treatment.

Appetite

Appetite is something that often changes with age. Recognising that a reduced appetite, resulting in a reduced intake, can have significant consequences for physical and mental health is essential for early intervention. There is a misconception that as we age our requirements decrease and therefore eating less is a natural consequence. However, this is not true for all nutrients and some nutritional requirements, such as protein, actually increase with age. Some causes of a poor appetite may be rectified more easily than others, for example, if the cause is a medication or dental issue, but psychological barriers may be more complex and require a treatment plan to be put in place.

Residents struggling with a poor appetite may prefer a 'little and often' approach to mealtimes by offering smaller more frequent meals and snacks throughout the day. To provide sufficient nutrition, it

is key to ensure that meals and snacks are nutrient-dense by fortifying foods with full-fat products, such as cheese and milk, and optimising snacks, for example encouraging full-fat yoghurt with fruit or nut butter with toast.



Staff Training and Awareness

Inadequate knowledge or training of nutrition and dietary requirements amongst staff members in a care home can

contribute to suboptimal meal provision. To overcome this, it's important to have clear protocols and appropriate training on nutrition and hydration in place, empowering staff to identify signs of malnutrition or dehydration and intervene appropriately.

Malnutrition can be caused by a vast array of reasons, some of which may not be easily treated. However, through encouraging training and awareness, malnutrition can be identified earlier and appropriate solutions implemented so that care homes can effectively prevent and mitigate the condition among their residents, promoting better health and quality of life.

Discover more about apetito's care home services: <https://apetito.link/careengland>

1: Malnutrition Task Force. Malnutrition in England factsheet [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2024 Oct 17]. Available from: <https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/malnutrition-england-factsheet>

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