

Malnutrition

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Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a serious condition that happens when your diet does not contain the right amount of nutrients.

It means "poor nutrition" and can refer to:

- under nutrition – not getting enough nutrients
- over nutrition – getting more nutrients than needed

Signs of malnutrition

Common signs of malnutrition include:

- [unintentional weight loss](#) – losing 5% to 10% or more of weight over 3 to 6 months is one of the main signs of malnutrition
- a low body weight – people with a body mass index (BMI) under 18.5 are at risk of being malnourished (use the [BMI calculator](#) to work out your BMI)
- a lack of interest in eating and drinking
- feeling tired all the time
- feeling weak
- getting ill often and taking a long time to recover
- in children, not growing or not putting on weight at the expected rate

Other symptoms

Other symptoms of malnutrition include:

- reduced appetite
- lack of interest in food and drink
- feeling tired all the time
- feeling weaker
- getting ill often and taking a long time to recover
- wounds taking a long time to heal
- poor concentration
- feeling cold most of the time
- [low mood or depression](#)

Symptoms in children

Symptoms of malnutrition in a child can include:

- not growing or putting on weight at the expected rate (faltering growth)
- changes in behaviour, such as being unusually irritable, slow or anxious
- low energy levels and tiring more easily than other children

Who's at risk of malnutrition

- have a long-term health conditions that affect appetite, weight and/or how well nutrients are absorbed by the gut, such as [Crohn's disease](#)
- have [problems swallowing \(dysphagia\)](#)
- are socially isolated, have limited mobility, or a low income

Who's at risk of malnutrition

- need extra energy, such as people with [cystic fibrosis](#), are recovering from a serious injury or burns, and those with [tremors \(uncontrollable shaking\)](#)
- People who are 65 years and over are particularly at risk, and weight loss is not an inevitable result of old age.

Treatments for malnutrition

The first dietary advice is usually to:

- eat "fortified" foods that are high in calories and protein
- snack between meals
- have drinks that contain lots of calories

Preventing malnutrition

The best way to prevent malnutrition is to eat a healthy, balanced diet.

You need to eat a variety of foods from the main food groups, including:

- ❖ plenty of fruit and vegetables
- ❖ plenty of starchy foods such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta
- ❖ some milk and dairy foods or non-dairy alternatives
- ❖ some sources of protein, such as meat, fish, eggs and beans

Physical and social factors

- living alone and being socially isolated
- having limited knowledge about nutrition or cooking
- alcohol or drug dependency
- low income or poverty

Causes of malnutrition in children

In the UK, malnutrition in children is often caused by long-term health conditions that:

- lead to a lack of appetite
- disrupt digestion
- increase the body's demand for energy



Examples of these types of conditions include childhood cancers, [congenital heart disease](#), [cystic fibrosis](#) and [cerebral palsy](#).



Feeding tubes

If you are unable to eat enough to meet your body's needs – for example because you have [problems swallowing \(dysphagia\)](#) – an alternative way of getting nutrients may be needed.

Treatment may involve:

- dietary changes, such as eating foods high in energy and nutrients
- support for families to help them manage factors affecting the child's nutritional intake
- treatment for any underlying medical conditions causing malnutrition
- vitamin and mineral supplements
- high-energy and protein nutritional supplements – if the other treatments are not enough on their own

Thanks