

10 Ways Malnutrition Can Impact Your Health—and 6 Steps to Prevent It

Good nutrition is vital at every stage of life, but as you age, staying well-nourished is even more important!

10 Ways Malnutrition Can Impact Your Health

Muscles and Bones

Your body naturally loses muscle and bone as you age; however, malnutrition can accelerate these losses and impact your independence and ability to be active.

1. **Mobility:** Weak muscles and bones can make it harder to do everyday tasks like walking, dressing, and bathing.
2. **Posture:** Muscles and bones are needed to help keep you upright. If they are weak, you may strain your neck, back, and shoulder muscles, causing you to feel pain.
3. **Strength:** Poor muscle strength may make it more difficult to do your favorite activities.
4. **Falls:** Muscle and bone problems are major risk factors for falls.

Immune System and Healing

When your body lacks nutrition, your white blood cell count can decrease, making it harder for your body to heal and fight illnesses.

5. **Healing:** Your body's nutrition influences your recovery, since wounds need energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals to heal.
6. **Cancer:** If you are malnourished, it is more difficult to tolerate chemotherapy.
7. **Illness:** A poor immune system can increase your risk for illnesses and infections.

Organs

Not having enough protein and other nutrients can harm your organs.

8. **Eyes:** Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can accelerate vision loss caused by glaucoma, cataracts, and/or macular degeneration.
9. **Brain:** Nutrient deficiencies may speed up the rate at which your brain loses neurons, which can impair mental function.
10. **Kidneys:** A lack of fluids and electrolytes can cause your kidneys to overwork, which can affect their ability to function.

6 Steps to Prevent Malnutrition

1. **Understand what malnutrition is and isn't.** Learn the facts and warning signs at ncoa.org/NutritionTools.
2. **Make smart food choices.** Get tips to build a healthy plate at ncoa.org/EatWell.
3. **Try an oral nutritional supplement.** It can provide you with balanced nutrition.
4. **Take care of your teeth.** A healthy mouth makes it easier to eat well.
5. **Consult your health care provider** if you have unplanned weight loss, a poor appetite, or other problems that affect eating.
6. **Find help.** Contact MealsonWheelsAmerica.org to see if you can get home-delivered meals and find out if you're eligible for help paying for food at BenefitsCheckUp.org/SNAP.

