

Good Nutrition for Later Life and the Risks of Malnutrition

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Introduction

- I am a Nutrition Support Worker.
- This talk gives general advice to suit most people. If you have a health condition you need to follow your specific advice.
- The advice is valid as of September 2025. If you access the talk later, the advice may have changed.

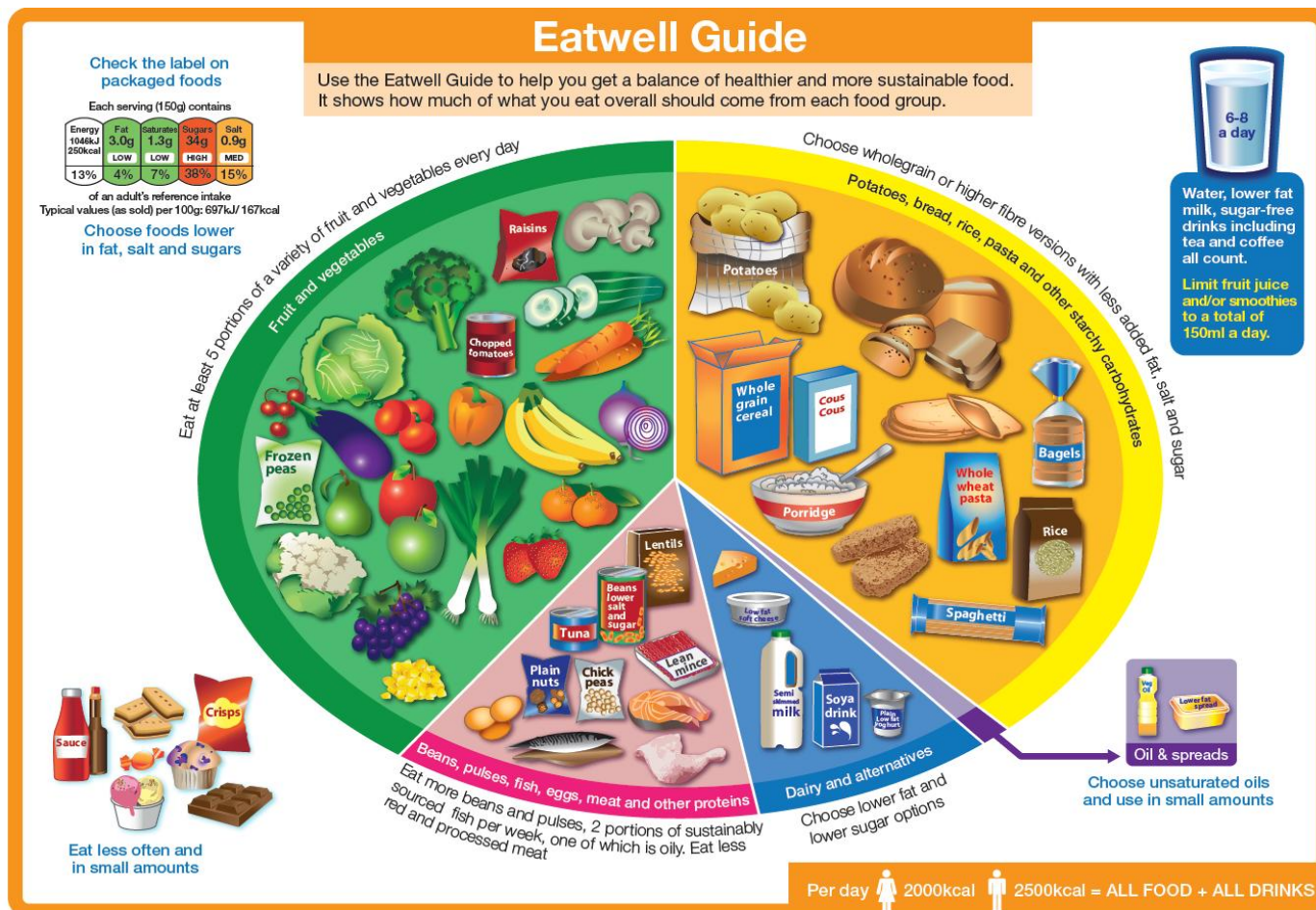
Myth busting questions

- Is it better to weigh less as you get older?
- Does your appetite get smaller as you age?
- Is it normal to get thinner in later life?
- Is it only very thin people who are at risk of malnutrition?
- Should sugar and fats be avoided?
- Do drinks high in caffeine count towards good hydration?
- Is malnutrition more likely to affect people in hospitals and care homes?

Myth busting answers

- Is it better to weigh less as you get older? *No, Older people, particularly 70+, may need the extra energy reserves to fight off disease and recover more quickly from injuries*
- Does your appetite get smaller as you age? *Yes, But this doesn't mean that you should eat less. try having small frequent meals and snacks high in energy & protein & fluids*
- Is it normal to get thinner in later life? *No, It's important to maintain a healthy weight. Health professionals actually recommend a slightly higher BMI so that we have fat to fall back on if we are ill or injured*
- Is it only very thin people who are at risk of malnutrition? *No, It doesn't matter how thin you are – if you lose a significant amount of weight unintentionally this may be a symptom of malnutrition*
- Should sugar and fats be avoided? *No (but most of us should eat in moderation). If you are unintentionally losing weight you might need to increase*
- Do drinks high in caffeine count towards good hydration? *Yes! Coffee and tea do contribute to hydration. However, alcohol DOES cause dehydration.*
- Is malnutrition more likely in hospitals and care homes? *No, Research suggests that 93% of malnutrition affects people living independently in their own homes*

Good Nutrition and Wellbeing



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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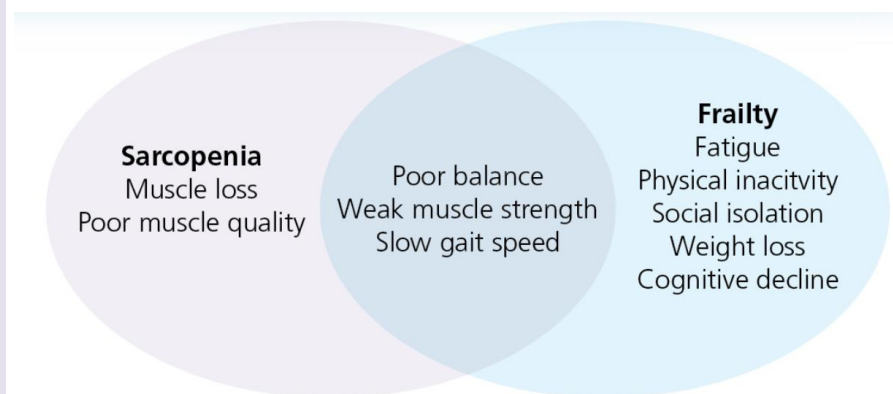
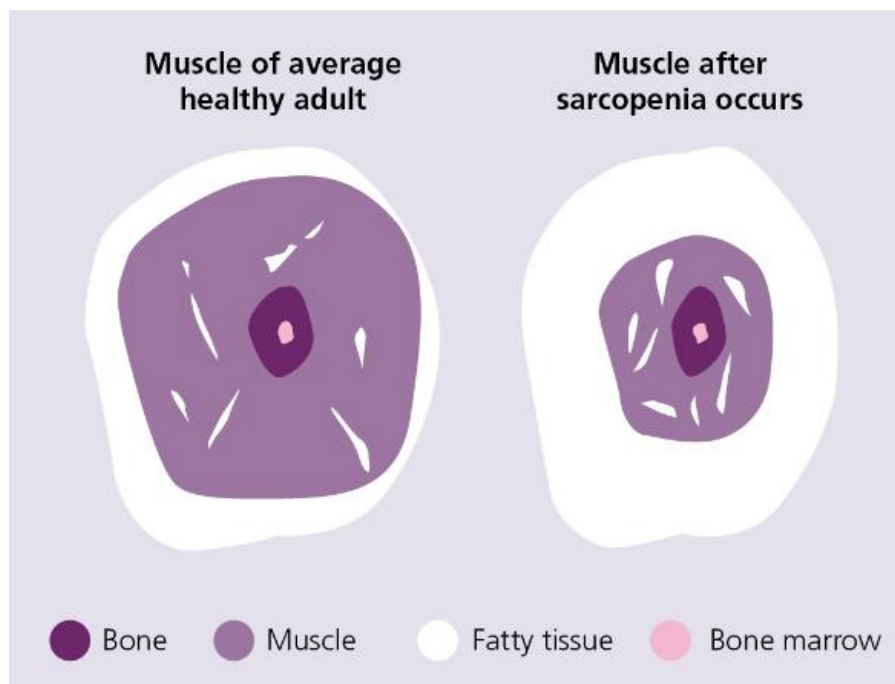
Hydration

Hydrating drinks options include:

- hot or cold tea and coffee
- milk and milky drinks
- fruit juices
- sports or soft drinks
- smoothies
- Plain, sparkling or flavoured water
- alcoholic beverages *less than 4% vol*



Muscle Strength and Fatigue



How can we maintain muscle strength as we age?



Resistance activities

To increase and improve muscle mass and/or strength against a weight and/or force. Completing a form of physical activity regularly can help support this.



Diet

A nutrient dense diet including foods high in protein and calcium for example, meat/fish and beans and dairy products like milk, cheese and yoghurt. As well as taking a vitamin D supplement to help maintain/improve our muscle health as we age.



Hydration

Good hydration is important as we age and to reduce the change of dehydration. We should aim to have approximately 1600-2000ML (3-3.5 pints) a day of fluid. Fluid can include water, juice, tea/coffee and any other of your favourite drinks.

Physical Activity

Intensity	Activities
Low	Moving around your home, getting up to make a cup of tea, gardening, walking, standing up
Medium	Pushing a lawn mower, water aerobics, walking long distances at one time
High	Swimming, dance, running

Strength Exercises

- Carrying shopping bags
- Gardening
- Standing and sitting up from your chair
- Yoga
- Resistance band exercises
- Tin cans in each hand, lift in front then to the side
- Balancing whilst holding onto a chair/ wall

Signs of Malnutrition

- Loss of appetite
- A lack of interest in eating and drinking
- Unintentional weight loss, which means a weight loss of more than 5% over a period of 3-6 months
- Clothes, rings, jewellery, dentures may become loose
- Feeling tired all the time, loss of energy and weakness
- Altered mood, lethargy and depression
- Reduced ability to perform normal tasks
- A low body weight, this is individuals who have a BMI under 18.5kg/m²

Causes of Malnutrition

- **Ageing** reduced appetite and sense of thirst, harder to absorb nutrients
- **Medical** e.g. ill health, COPD, cancer, swallowing difficulties
- **Physical** e.g. pain, taste changes, poor dentistry, sight loss
- **Social** e.g. isolation, bereavement, finance

Implications of Malnutrition

- Weight loss, muscle loss and weakness
- Increased risk of infection
- Slow recovery from illness and wound healing
- Impaired thermoregulation - difficulty keeping warm

... and the signs and symptoms we mentioned before

Food Fortification

What is food fortification?

- Food fortification means adding ordinary, household ingredients to normal food to increase its nutritional content, without increasing the amount of food that needs to be eaten
- e.g. adding nutrient dense foods such as peanut butter, cheese, skimmed milk or protein powder to meals and snacks





1 scoop of mashed
potato

Add 1 tbsp of grated
cheese provides
extra 40kcal!



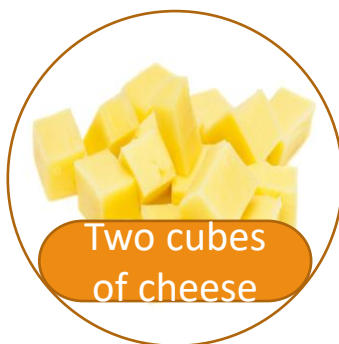
1 bowl of porridge

Add half tbsp
ground almonds and
half tbsp Greek
yoghurt provides
76kcal!

The "100 calorie" boost



1 TBSP oil



Two cubes
of cheese



2 TBSP
honey



2 Jaffa
Cakes



2 TBSP Greek
yoghurt



Small
Banana



1egg scrambled
with milk



2 TBSP
skimmed milk
powder



Handful of
nuts



1 TBSP
Peanut butter

Home made supplements



Ingredients:

- 180ml full fat milk
- 2 generous tablespoons (30g) skimmed milk powder
- 4 heaped teaspoons (20g) vitamin fortified milkshake powder*

* Nesquik, Asda own brand, Morrisons own brand or Lidl Goody Cao. Horlicks Original or Ovaltine Original are all fortified milkshake powders

Directions:

Mix milk powder and milkshake powder together in a glass. Gradually mix in milk and stir well.
1 portion = 220ml
Serve 2 portions per day

How to Encourage Better Eating

Eat softer, moist foods

- easier to chew and swallow

Try smaller meals, with more frequent snacks in between

- easier to eat and digest, e.g. if no appetite or breathless
- avoids food getting cold – but do offer seconds!
- try finger foods such as cocktail sausages, cheese cubes, grapes

Make liquids more nourishing e.g. soups, smoothies and milkshakes

- offer these in addition to meals if there is a risk of malnutrition

Take your time eating

- sit at a table, avoid distractions, don't eat in a rush

More ideas

- try different coloured foods, change cutlery e.g. spoon instead of knife and fork, try coloured plates or bowls

Summary:

- Try small, frequent meals and snacks instead of 3 large meals
- Snacks ideas include - creamy yoghurts, cheese, nuts, buffet foods
- Eat food high in calories and protein - full fat dairy products, meat and fish
- Avoid diet or low-fat products
- Try nourishing drinks - whole milk, milkshakes, hot chocolate, Ovaltine
- Fortify food – add ground nuts to soups, add cheese to mashed potato
- Fortify your milk with skimmed milk powder and use in place of usual milk
- Join a lunch club!
- **If concerned, see GP for advice. They will refer on if needed.**

Thank you for listening!

Highly recommended 1 pager

- [British Dietetic Association: Eating, Drinking and Ageing Well](#) (1 sheet)

For those at risk of malnutrition –

- [Eating Well – Quick Guide](#) (1 sheet)
- [Eating Well for Small Appetites](#) (3 sheets)
- [Homemade Supplements](#) (1 sheet)

****N.B. These are general. Take individual dietary requirements into account****

Taste changes

Loss of taste may result in difficulty eating. If foods taste:

Salty: avoid foods such as packet soups, gravy, sauces, bacon, tinned meats, crisps and nuts. add a pinch of sugar to sauces and soups

Sweet: choose lower sugar foods and add a pinch of salt to drinks and puddings

Metallic: season foods using lemon juice, vinegar, salt, pepper, garlic, soy sauce, curry powder or herbs. Avoid tea, coffee, chocolate and artificial sweetener

Bland: use extra flavourings such as pickles, mustard, herbs, spices, curries, mature cheese and smoked fish

Cold drinks tend to taste better than hot drinks. **Fizzy drinks** such as lemonade or mineral water can be refreshing. **Peppermint tea and Boiled Sweets** can also help hide unpleasant taste changes