



# Malnutrition Task Force

*Eating and drinking well in later life*

## A guide to using tools to help start conversations about eating well in later life





Please note that the tools in this guide are not validated clinical screening tools and should not be used to replace screening tools like the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool 'MUST' used by healthcare professionals. The tools are designed to start a conversation about eating well in later life.



## Self-screening for older people

This is a guide about how to start conversations with tools that can be used by anyone to help identify those at risk of undernutrition.

It is estimated that one-in-ten older people are at risk of, or are undernourished, the majority of whom are living in the community.

This means that they are not eating enough to maintain their health and well-being.

Signs of unintentional weight loss often go unnoticed until it begins to have an effect on a person's health and well-being.

The tools in this pack will help to raise awareness and tackle the problem of undernutrition in the community by:

- encouraging conversations about eating and drinking, to raise awareness of undernutrition in later life,
- helping to identify those at risk using easy to use tools,
- providing basic advice about eating well in later life, and signposting to more information.



Our booklet - Eating Well in Later Life - offers practical tips on eating and keeping well as life changes - you can download a copy here:

<https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/resources-and-tools/self-screening-resource-pack>

## The Tools

The tools in this guide will help to identify if someone is at risk of undernutrition. They will help start a conversation, and provide some practical ideas of what to do next.

If you or someone you know is worried about unintentional weight loss, or having difficulty eating or swallowing, then speak to a GP, Practice Nurse or health professional.

The guide contains information and instructions about how to use the following tools:

1. The **Nutrition Wheel**\* is an interactive tool, with an explanatory guide and advice sheets to give to those identified as 'at risk'
2. The **Patients Association Nutrition Checklist**\* and instructions on how to use
3. The **BAPEN** is a validated, self-screening online tool, which is available here <https://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/>
4. The **Eating Well in Later Life** booklet

Additional copies of all these tools and our booklet '**Eating Well in Later Life**' can be found at [www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk](http://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk)

Hard copies of the Nutrition Wheel can be ordered by emailing us at [enquiries@malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk)

*\* These are not validated clinical screening tools and should not be used to replace screening tools like the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool ('**MUST**') used by healthcare professionals. They are designed to start conversations about eating well in later life.*

## When should the tools be used?

The tools in this guide are all slightly different — but you do not need any special training to use any of them. They have been designed for use by anyone in community settings, care homes, and domiciliary care; also, they can be used by older people or family members in their own homes.

Some ideas where the tools could be used include:

- waiting areas within GP practices, community clinics, community pharmacists,
- care homes for family/carers,
- domiciliary care workers during home visits,
- voluntary sector organisations running home visits, home from hospital services, and discharge services.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or feedback about using the guide, or want to share positive practice on how you have used the tools, please email us at [enquiries@malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk)

Alternatively, please visit

<https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/resources/submit-a-resource>





## How to use the Nutrition Wheel...

1. Start by asking the older person questions 1 – 4 on the outer edge of the Wheel. If the person answers **no** to all these questions, then it is unlikely that they are at risk of malnutrition and so no further action is needed. If the person answers **yes** or **don't know** then move to the inner questions A – D.
2. Ask the 4 inner questions. If they answer **yes** to any of these questions then they may be at risk of malnutrition. Twist the inner wheel so the inner question they answered **yes** to is in line with the arrow on the outer wheel.

For example, the image shows that someone answered **yes** to question A and so the volunteer/carer has twisted the wheel so question A and the arrow are aligned.

3. Turn the wheel over and the corresponding advice will be shown in the window. This can be repeated as many times as needed.
4. If they answer **yes** to any of the questions, provide them with the advice sheet (which can be downloaded from the MTF website) and show them which sections are relevant.

Additional guides, advice sheets and other resources to be used alongside the Nutrition Wheel can be downloaded from

<https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/resources/nutrition-wheel>

## The Patients Association Checklist

The Patients Association Checklist below provides a guide for signs that help may be needed. It then provides information and guidance that may be needed to move forward.

There are two versions of the checklist: one for use by older people and their families, and the other for health, social care and volunteers supporting them.

The version below is for use by older people and their families.

- Fill in [Section A](#) of the checklist. This will help you identify if you are underweight or have lost weight without meaning to.
- If you answer 'No' to all the questions, you don't need to fill in any more
- If you answer 'Yes' or 'Don't Know' to any questions in [Section A](#), go to [Section B](#) to assess your situation and needs. Your answers will help anyone offering you advice.
- [Section C](#) helps you understand the next steps to take if you need help with your diet, including ideas of whom to contact.
- Find ideas, information and advice about diet and eating in [Section D](#).

Additional copies of both versions of The Patients Association Checklist can be downloaded from:

<https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/patients-association-nutrition-checklist>

## Section A: Initial Assessment

Tick the relevant box to indicate your answers throughout the checklist.

### Signs that you may need help or advice to gain weight or eat differently

<p>1. Are you or your family concerned that you may be underweight or need nutritional advice?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>2. Have you lost weight unintentionally in the past three to six months?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please state why? _____</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>3. Have you noticed that your clothes or rings have become loose recently?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>4. Have you recently found that you have lost your appetite and/or interest in eating?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/></p>

### Did you answer 'No' to all these questions?

There is no need to fill in the rest of this checklist, but you may find some of the information in [Sections C and D](#) useful.

### Did you answer 'Yes' or 'Don't know' to one or more questions?

Please go to **Section B**

## Section B: Assessing your situation and needs

**Which of the following apply to you?** Please tick all that apply:

I am having difficulty swallowing

Eating makes me cough

I am having difficulty chewing food

I am having difficulty cutting my food

I am on a special diet or have a condition which impacts my eating

I do not think I am eating enough of the right foods

I am unsure what foods I should be eating

I have a poorer appetite than before

I don't really enjoy eating

I often feel weak, tired and fatigued

I am finding it difficult to drink or drink enough

I live alone

I am concerned about my ability to shop for food

I am concerned about my ability to cook meals

I am concerned about food budgeting

## Did you tick one or more boxes?

Yes - it looks as if you may find some advice about diet useful. We suggest you go to [Sections C and D](#) for guidance on what to do next.

No - go to [Section D](#) for further information, and if you have any concerns, follow the advice in [Section C](#) about seeing a healthcare professional.

## Section C: Next Steps

**Please take the checklist to your GP, Practice Nurse or local Dietitian so that they can review it and assess your needs.**

You may be offered:

- ✓ advice on nutrition and gaining weight,
- ✓ tests to check your weight and for causes of weight loss,
- ✓ a referral to a GP, nurse, dietitian or other specialist,
- ✓ recommendations for different food or food supplements if appropriate,
- ✓ a referral to other local services.

## Section D: Tips and ideas about eating

If you have difficulty cutting, chewing or swallowing food, or a condition affecting your diet, eat softer foods, such as macaroni cheese or fish pie and milky drinks or finger foods

- Please ensure you report any difficulty swallowing or coughing during eating to your healthcare professional, who can help you or refer you to a specialist
- If you have a condition affecting your eating, talk to your healthcare professional about how to manage your diet
- If you have difficulty chewing you may find it helpful to see your dentist. If you need advice, you can contact the Oral Health Foundation dental helpline on 01788 539780

If you are underweight, have lost weight unintentionally or have a poor appetite, then consider:

- eating smaller meals and snacks frequently,
- having milky drinks between meals,
- avoiding low calorie foods and drinks, instead use full fat dairy products, for example, whole milk, full fat yoghurts and cheese to help build weight,
- fortifying foods with extra calories and protein by adding four tablespoons of dried milk powder to a pint of whole milk to use in porridge, or by adding cream cheese to mashed potato, or by adding ground almonds to soups,
- choosing quick and easy but nutritious meals like sardines or beans on toast with cheese,
- using supplement drinks to help add protein, vitamins, minerals and calories such as Complan, Meritene and Aymes Retail, which can be bought at a supermarket or chemist.

If you are finding it difficult to drink or drink enough, then

- aim for eight drinks a day. All fluids count so choose your favourites including milky drinks, diluted squash or food such as soup or custard,
- or
- if you are on thickened fluids and finding this difficult, make an appointment to see the Speech and Language Therapist or other professional who suggested this diet.

If you have concerns about cooking or shopping for yourself

You may find it helpful to make use of local services available such as:

- Day centres and luncheon clubs  
(contact your local voluntary sector organisation)
- Visiting schemes or befriending services
- Transport services
- Meals on wheels, for example, hot or frozen ready-made meals delivered to your home
- Online shopping

You may be eligible for help including ‘meals on wheels’ from social services so contact your local authority for advice. Contact Citizens Advice for information on local services and budgeting help on 03444 111 444.

## **Monitoring your weight**

It is helpful to monitor your weight by weighing yourself once a week and keeping a record to see whether you are losing a lot of weight over time.

You may also want to check your BMI (or Body Mass Index) which is a recognised measure.



*Putting patients at the centre  
of good nutritional care*

## **BAPEN self-screening tool (online tool)**

BAPEN's online self-screening tool is designed for people who are worried about their weight or the weight of somebody they care about, to quickly and easily work out if there is a risk of malnutrition.

The self-screening tool is based on BAPEN's 'Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool' ('MUST'), which is the most common nutritional screening tool used by healthcare professionals throughout the UK. You will need:

- access to the internet,
- the older person's weight now, and an idea of their weight 3-6 months ago,
- the older person's height.

## **How to use the tool**

1. Visit the self-screening calculator  
<http://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org/self-screening.html>
2. Enter the person's current height and weight into the online calculator
3. Enter the person's weight 3-6 months ago
4. You will be given a rating that will say whether the person is low, medium or high risk of malnutrition
5. Make a note of the person's weight and score from the tool so you can discuss these with a healthcare professional if you are concerned. You can also use the calculations to compare in the future.

## What the ratings mean?

Low	<p>It is unlikely that you are at risk of becoming malnourished at the moment and you should continue eating as you are currently. If in the future you are concerned about unplanned weight loss or loss of appetite you should check your weight again.</p>
Medium	<p>There is some risk of you being malnourished. Try to eat three meals a day with snacks and nourishing drinks in between if you can. If you usually eat low fat “diet” type foods, switch to the full fat or full calorie equivalents as the energy in them may halt or slow unplanned weight loss.</p> <p>If you have a health issue that requires a special diet, chat with your GP, Practice Nurse or health professional before fortifying food. Keep an eye on your weight, record it and screen yourself again in in about 6 months time or sooner if you are concerned.</p> <p>If you are worried about your weight or having difficulty eating, make an appointment to see your GP.</p>
High	<p>You should arrange to see your doctor as it is likely that you are at high risk of being malnourished. Your doctor will be able to provide advice and may refer you to a dietitian for more advice on what you should do.</p>



If you're worried about losing weight or struggling to eat enough, the Malnutrition Task Force website has lots more tips and suggestions, visit: [www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/](http://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/)

For more information and to download additional copies of the Tools, please visit [www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk](http://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk)