

Malnutrition and Dehydration

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Physical and Chemical Changes that Influence Needs

- People who are sick or elderly have different food requirements than young, healthy people. They are also more likely to suffer harm from not eating the right foods. After age 50, there are chemical and physical changes in the body that affect nutritional status.
 - The metabolic rate, or metabolism, slows down. The metabolic rate is the speed at which the body uses energy. Older bodies burn less fuel for daily operations. This means seniors need fewer calories for normal, everyday activities.
 - Lean tissue and muscle mass decrease. There is less bone mass. Body fat decreases.
 - Stomach acid may decrease and the stomach might not empty as fast. Intestine may absorb less nutrition from the food it gets.



Physical and Chemical Changes that Influence Needs Cont.

- Continued
 - Tooth and gum problems increase, sometimes making it difficult to chew.
 - Some people have trouble swallowing, especially those who have strokes.
 - There is a loss of taste and smell, this causes people to be less interested in food.
 - Sometimes people are too tired or weak to eat an entire meal.
 - Appetite and thirst decrease. Many elderly or ill people eat and drink less than they should. This leads to fatigue, sadness, infections, skin breakdown, and lack of energy.
 - Medications can affect appetite and thirst. Sometimes medicines upset the stomach or cause intestinal problems like diarrhea or constipation.
 - Many disease affect the way the body uses food and water. Someone with an illness usually needs more food and water because the body needs energy to heal. People with some conditions, however, must carefully control the amount and type of calories they take in. Diabetes is one example.



Malnutrition

- Bodies will break down if they do not get the type and amount of fuel they need. Malnutrition means “badly nourished,” another way of saying that the person isn’t getting enough of the right nutrients the body needs to stay healthy. It can be caused by not eating enough nutritious foods or by not adequately digesting and absorbing nutrients from food. Getting too much food is harmful and is also called malnutrition.
- Someone who experiences one or more of the following things might be headed for malnutrition:
 - Fails to eat from the major food groups most of the time.
 - Eats less than half of two or more meals per day.



Malnutrition Cont.

- Continued
 - Eats less than one hot meal per day.
 - Changes from solid foods to pureed foods, or other dietary changes.
 - Drinks a lot of alcohol.
 - Is socially isolated or depressed.
 - Is poor or has difficulty obtaining or preparing food because of physical or mental disabilities.
 - Has some cognitive problems that might interfere with remembering to eat.
 - Has excessive laxative use.
 - Has had recent surgery or illness, or chronic or multiple diseases.
- 25%-30% of senior citizens are malnourished.



Signs and Symptoms of Malnutrition

- If a person shows any of these signs, they should be seen by a doctor. Taking care of someone with malnutrition means helping them get enough of the right nutrients.
 - Tiredness and lack of energy
 - Loss of appetite
 - Loss of or gain in weight
 - Sore lips, tongue, or throat
 - Infections or slow healing
 - Diarrhea or constipation
 - Easy bruising
 - Depression or confusion
- Older adults and those who are chronically ill should be weighed regularly to be sure they are getting enough calories and are not losing or gaining weight.



Dehydration

- Dehydration is a serious, sometimes fatal condition. It means there are not enough body fluids and important blood salts in the body for it to carry on normal functions at the best level. This happens by loss of fluids, not drinking enough water, or in combination of both.
- Water is essential in all vital functions of the body. It is part of temperature regulation, building new cells, lubricating joints, and keeping the kidneys, brain, heart and other organs working.
- Thirst is the warning signal that we should drink. However, just drinking when we are thirsty is not enough. Many people stay mildly dehydrated much of the time.
- You are drinking enough water if your urine is always pale in color and you are urinating every two to three hours.



Preventing Dehydration

- A healthy adult should drink at least 6-8 eight-ounce glasses of water per day.
- It is possible to get some necessary fluids from other drinks, but anything with caffeine in it does not count in the daily requirement. In fact, caffeinated drinks, such as coffee, tea, and soda, actually increase the daily requirement. Caffeine pulls water from the body, increasing the need for fluid intake. For every eight-ounce caffeinated drink, add an extra eight ounces of water to the daily requirement.



Preventing Dehydration Cont.

- Reasons people don't drink enough fluid:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Lack of thirst
 - Don't like frequent bathroom trips
- Reasons people lose fluid:
 - Fever
 - Vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Excessive urine output
 - Excessive sweating; exercise
 - Heat exhaustion



Symptoms of Dehydration

- Always pay attention to what patients drink and how much they urinate. The following symptoms could be signs of dehydration and must be reported immediately. Severe dehydration can result in seizures, permanent brain damage, heart and blood vessel collapse, and death if not treated quickly.
- Mild Dehydration:
 - Thirst; dry lips and tongue
 - Dry membranes in the mouth
 - Skin looks dry
- Moderate Dehydration:
 - Skin is not very elastic, may sag, and doesn't bounce back quickly when lightly pinched and released
 - Sunken eyes
 - Decreased urine output



Symptoms of Dehydration Cont.

- Severe Dehydration:
 - Small amounts of dark colored urine
 - Rapid, weak pulse over 100 (at rest)
 - Rapid breathing
 - Low blood pressure; dizziness
 - Blue lips
 - Cold hands and feet
 - Confusion, lack of interest, difficult to arouse
 - Shock



Treatment for Dehydration

- For mild dehydration, giving fluids by mouth is usually enough. This is called rehydration:
 - The physician may order an oral rehydrating solution (ORS) that replaces important blood salts and water in balanced amounts designed especially for dehydration in sick people. These solutions allow the intestines to absorb maximum amounts of water.
 - IV fluids may be necessary for moderate to severe dehydration.
 - Rapid recognition and treatment of dehydration results in a good outcome.



Ways to Help People Get Nutrients

- Care providers have a responsibility to ensure that patients' food needs are met. Take the following steps:
 - Fit the amount and the kinds of food to the individual. Serve tasty food.
 - Increase fiber to help move food through the intestines and prevent constipation.
 - Encourage people to eat with family and friends.
 - Use a blender or food processor for those with chewing or swallowing problems.
 - People with swallowing problems can choke on liquids that are too thin. A thickening agent can be added to liquids to help them drink. They may do best using a straw.
 - Chop or mash meats and vegetables with a little gravy or broth.
 - Use soft foods such as tuna, eggs, cheese, and peanut butter for meat substitutions.
 - Small frequent feedings and healthful snacks can encourage some people to eat. Have fruit, yogurt, or vegetables readily available.



Ways to Help People Get Nutrients Cont.

- Continued
 - Food that is served warm (not too hot or too cold) may seem tastier.
 - For someone who can't eat a whole meal, try six small meals per day.
 - Offer finger foods, such as sandwiches and fruits, to those who have difficulty managing utensils.
 - No single food can supply all the nutrients in the amounts needed.
 - Clear beef or chicken broth is a good way to get warm liquids in cold weather.
 - Some people may need to take vitamins and minerals in a supplement. People who get little sunlight may need vitamin D.
 - Thirst decreases with age, so encourage older people to drink fluids throughout the day. Offer water often and keep it readily available.