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](http://ncoa.org/NutritionTools).
2. **Make smart food choices**. Get tips to build a healthy plate at [ncoa.org/EatWell](http://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](http://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](http://BenefitsCheckUp.org/SNAP).