

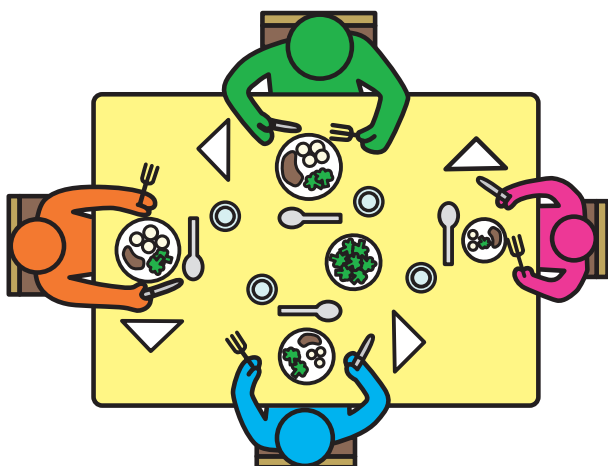
Food First

Eat and drink your way to better health

Managing Unplanned Weight Loss in Care Homes



Information for resident's family and friends



Weight loss happens when the body uses up more energy than it takes in.

Common reasons for why someone in a Care Home may not eat enough include:

- confusion
- difficulty chewing or swallowing
- anxiety or depression
- poor eyesight
- difficulty with feeding themselves
- tiredness
- reduced taste sensation

Common reasons that a resident may need more energy from food:

- the body is trying to heal a wound
- the resident is moving around a lot
- illnesses such as cancer and infections
- a stomach bug
- diseases that cause muscle wasting and tremors

Unplanned weight loss can be a sign that the resident is at risk of becoming malnourished. This can have harmful consequences for the resident. Because of this, every resident is regularly screened for their risk of malnutrition by care home staff and appropriate action can then be taken.

Ways to help stop weight loss

The first thing to consider is why the weight loss has happened:

- Does the resident need help eating and drinking?
- Do they need new dentures?
- Would they prefer to have food they can eat with their hands and not use a knife and fork?
- Has the GP looked at whether the resident has a physical illness or are they depressed or anxious?
- Is the weight loss due to the natural progression of their condition?

Food fortification:

This means adding every-day high calorie and high protein ingredients to meals and drinks to boost their nutritional value such as:

- butter
- oil
- cream
- whole milk
- skimmed milk powder
- mayonnaise
- cheese

The Care Home cook will be asked to do this for the resident if weight loss is a concern.

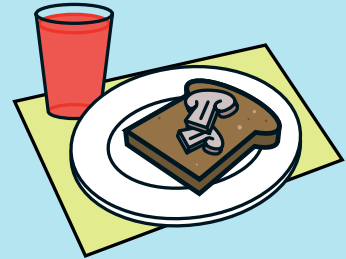


High energy snacks:

Nourishing snacks should be available throughout the day such as:

- A slice of malt loaf with butter
- cheese and biscuits
- half a scone or teacake with butter and jam
- a handful of nuts
- a piece of cake

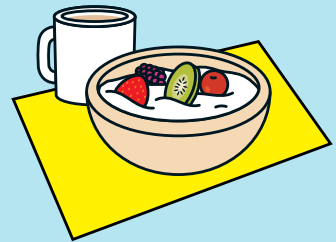
A plain biscuit like a Rich Tea with a cup of coffee is not a nourishing snack because it does not have enough calories.



Nourishing drinks:

These should be encouraged 2-3 times a day. Homemade fortified drinks are made with full cream milk (blue top), skimmed milk powder and other ingredients which are readily available within the home. One of these drinks could provide the same amount of energy and protein as a small meal:

- fortified milkshake
- fortified soup
- fortified smoothies
- fortified hot chocolate or coffee
- fortified malted drinks



How you can help

- Bring in additional foods and drinks which you know that the resident enjoys (please check with the care staff first).
- Visit the resident during mealtimes to help them with eating and drinking or to gently encourage the resident to eat.
- Making mealtimes a relaxed and social occasion.
- Taking the resident out to eat occasionally which can stimulate the appetite further.



Sometimes despite everyone's best efforts it is not always possible to prevent someone from losing weight. In the late stages of life, a person's desire for food and drink reduces. This is a natural process and does not cause the person distress even though they may not seem to be eating or drinking enough. In someone who is confused, or who 'forgets' to eat or how to eat, or is overly distracted or sleepy during mealtimes, it can be more distressing for them to have someone be overly demanding that they need to eat.

Nutritional Supplement Drinks or “Sip Feeds”

There are 2 types of supplement drinks:

- A powdered form that is then mixed with milk or water
- A ready-to-drink milkshake

These drinks are essentially fortified milky drinks, like the homemade versions mentioned previously, although they might not taste as familiar and pleasant as the fresh, homemade versions.

Sip feeds should only be prescribed by a Dietitian or a GP. These are a short term intervention that will be monitored on a monthly basis to assess their effectiveness.

Occasionally sip feeds can further reduce a resident’s appetite for food and snacks and therefore careful consideration is required as to whether they will be beneficial.

If the resident is not eating or drinking homemade nourishing drinks, despite being regularly offered, then they are unlikely to take a sip feed either, and therefore a prescription for them will not usually be of any benefit.

This does not mean that their nutritional needs are not being looked after by the Care Home. They will still be offered regular fortified meals plus nourishing snacks and drinks and any necessary support will be provided.

If you have any concerns about a resident’s weight or the food and drink being offered to them then you should raise this with the Care Home Manager.

Further information

For more information on malnutrition:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/MalnutritionFactSheet.pdf>

For guidance on eating well with dementia:

<http://www.cwt.org.uk/publication/eating-well-for-older-people-with-dementia/>

Age UK also have some useful information on eating well in later life: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Tel: 0800 055 6112

For guidance on the Food First approach please contact your GP practice for an information leaflet.