

# Older Adults and Nutrition Screening in the Community

## Central Zone Nutrition Services



Healthy eating for older adults is important for successful aging and overall quality of life. Optimizing eating patterns and reducing nutrition risk should be the overarching goal for all older adults.

### What is Nutrition Risk?

Nutrition risk is the presence of indicators such as unintentional weight loss, which lead to an inadequate intake of nutrients. A person can be identified as low, moderate or high nutrition risk based on the amount of risk factors they have. Many factors can put a person at nutrition risk. Examples include physical challenges and social patterns. Early identification of nutrition risk can lead to interventions that maintain quality of life and decrease risk of hospitalization. Without intervention, nutrition risk can result in malnutrition.

### What is Malnutrition?

Malnutrition is defined as an ongoing unbalanced nutrition intake. In clinical practice, undernutrition and inadequate intake of protein and other nutrients is the focus. Malnutrition leads to *changes in body composition* where you see muscle wasting and fat loss. In the long term malnutrition can lead to functional impairment and frailty.

### What is Nutrition Screening?

Nutrition screening is a series of questions that identifies nutrition risk early on, or “upstream”. Screening is used to identify older adults who need nutrition education, community resources, or a comprehensive assessment to determine the extent of their nutrition problems, and to diagnose malnutrition. Screeners do not need to have specialized skills in nutrition care to complete nutrition screening as training can be provided to Individuals who screen. All older adults that are screened are provided with general nutrition information. Older adults found to have nutrition risk are referred for further assessment and/or community services.

### Screening in the Community

Nutrition risk and malnutrition are prevalent in geriatric populations and contribute to the onset of frailty. Therefore routine nutrition screening for malnutrition is recommended for **all older adults** (aged  $\geq 65$ ). Aged 55+ can also be screened. An older adult is considered community-dwelling if they are responsible for getting at least two meals a day on their own.

In community settings, use SCREEN-8 (8 questions). SCREEN-8© is a valid and reliable tool that quickly identifies older adults at nutrition risk, specific nutrition areas that need improvement and the need for referral to a Registered Dietitian or other health care provider.

### How often should you screen?

The frequency of screening depends on the number of older adults served through your site, and the available resources for screening. For a health clinic, it is recommended that screening be repeated yearly in older adults. This way, you are able to monitor progress in “at risk” older adults and identify nutrition changes in those who are not initially “at risk”.

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## Communication to physicians

It is important to develop a communication plan so that physicians are aware of the nutrition screen results, resources provided, referrals made, and any follow up plans for their patients.

## Nutrition Resources

The nutrition education materials posted on the AHS website provides both the public and health professionals with consistent, evidence-based resources for key nutrition topics.

AHS *malnutrition resources* can be found at: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page15661.aspx>

### Sample Client Resources:

- [Adding Calories and Protein to Your Diet](#)
- [High Protein, High Calorie Meal and Snack Ideas](#)
- [Making Smoothies with More Calories and Protein](#)
- [Nutrition Supplements](#)
- [Recipes to Help you Get Enough Calories and Protein](#)
- [Understanding Nutrition and Dementia: Facility Living](#)
- [Understanding Nutrition and Dementia: Home Living](#)
- [Eating Well to Prevent or Treat Osteoporosis](#)

### Sample Health Professional Resources:

- [Seniors Health Overview](#)
- [Frailty, Nutrition Risk and Malnutrition in Seniors \(65 years and older\)](#)
  - See also [www.ahs.ca/malnutrition](http://www.ahs.ca/malnutrition)
- [Pressure Injuries: Prevention and Management](#)

Coming Soon!  
AHS Malnutrition  
Toolkit

Additional *nutrition education resources* can be found at:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page11115.aspx>

### NEW! Staying Strong and Healthy as We Age

Free Zoom workshop for anyone wanting to learn practical ways to stay strong and healthy while aging.

Participants will learn:

- How food can help maintain strength
- The four key pillars of activity
- Tips to make meals easier
- The importance of social connection

Register and view the class schedule here:

[www.ahs.ca/ahlp](http://www.ahs.ca/ahlp)

Or

Call 1-877-314-6997



## References

1. Alberta Health Services – Nutrition Services. Nutrition guideline Frailty, Nutrition Risk and Malnutrition in Seniors (65 years and older) [Internet]. Alberta: AHS; July 2018. Available from: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-ng-frailty-nutrition-risk-and-malnutrition-in-seniors.pdf>
2. Alberta Health Services – Nutrition Services. Nutrition guideline Seniors Health Overview (65 years and older) [Internet]. Alberta: AHS; July 2019. Available from: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-ng-seniors-health-overview.pdf>
3. Canadian Malnutrition Task Force – Resources and Tools, Primary and Community Care [Internet]. Accessed April 13, 2022. Available from: <https://nutritioncareinCanada.ca/resources-and-tools/primary-community-care/overview>
4. Older Adult Nutrition Screening [Internet]. Accessed April 13, 2021. Available from: <https://olderadultnutritionscreening.com/>