

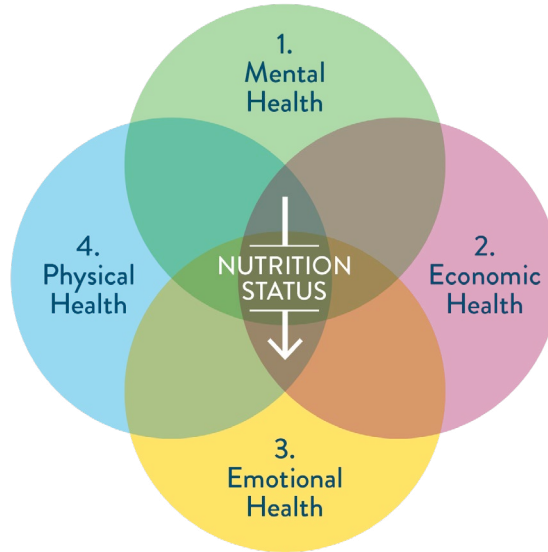
# NUTRITION AND AGING: MAXIMIZING THE CAREGIVER'S ROLE

## PEOPLE ARE LIVING LONGER

By 2050, the number of older adults (60+) globally is expected to reach 2 billion, up from 900 million in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Aging is different for everyone. It's a complex process that introduces physical, emotional, cognitive, and economic changes<sup>2</sup> that can make it harder for older adults to access the nutrients they need, placing them at an increased risk for malnutrition.

## EFFECT OF THE AGING PROCESS ON NUTRITION STATUS



### 1. MENTAL HEALTH

Loss of memory, confusion, dementia

### 2. ECONOMIC HEALTH

Poverty/limited income, food insecurity, difficulty finding transportation

### 3. EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Social isolation, loneliness, depression

### 4. PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Altered body composition: loss of muscle, increase in body fat
- Sensory changes: taste, smell, and perception of thirst
- Poor dentition: difficulty chewing, inability to eat certain foods
- Chronic (long-term) health conditions: cancer, diabetes, heart disease

**UP TO 50% OF OLDER ADULTS ARE AT RISK FOR MALNUTRITION<sup>3</sup>**

## MALNUTRITION

Malnutrition—which can refer to both under- and overnutrition—is an imbalance in a person's energy and/or nutrient intake.<sup>4</sup> It can cause loss of muscle mass, making it harder to maintain ongoing health and independence.<sup>5</sup>

The primary focus of this resource is undernutrition.

## MALNUTRITION IN OLDER ADULTS CAN:

- Lead to more health complications, falls, and hospital readmissions<sup>6,7</sup>
- Increase healthcare costs<sup>8</sup>
- Decrease quality of life<sup>9</sup>

## WHAT SHOULD CAREGIVERS LOOK FOR IN OLDER ADULTS?



### WEIGHT

Have they recently lost weight? Do their clothes appear to be fitting more loosely?



### EATING HABITS

Have their eating habits significantly changed? Do they seem less interested in the foods they once enjoyed?



### HYDRATION

Has their fluid intake decreased significantly?

## OTHER FACTORS CAREGIVERS SHOULD CONSIDER:

### ACCESS TO FOOD

- Is there enough food in the home?

### INDEPENDENCE

- Can they leave the home to get the food they need?
- Can they prepare meals?
- Are they able to feed themselves?

### BEHAVIOR CHANGES

- Are they showing signs of weakness?
- Do they display signs of confusion or a decline in mental ability?

### SOCIAL CHANGES

- Do they have limited social contact with family and friends?

### FINANCIAL CHANGES

- Have they mentioned a change in their financial status or difficulty affording the food they need?

# NUTRITION AND AGING: MAXIMIZING THE CAREGIVER'S ROLE

Caregivers can promote good nutrition by addressing common nutrition concerns. This will help older adults meet their nutrition needs and prevent malnutrition.

## NUTRITION CONCERN



### CALORIES

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**CALORIES** come from carbohydrates, protein, and fat and provide our bodies with the energy they need to function.

Choosing to eat a wide variety of foods can help older adults meet their calorie needs and get key nutrients, including different vitamins and minerals.

## ENCOURAGE OLDER ADULTS TO...

- Eat at least 3 meals a day
- Eat snacks throughout the day for extra calories
- Add herbs and spices to foods to enhance interest in eating
- Increase food variety by preparing meals and snacks with nutrient-rich foods (eg, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish, and lean meats)



### PROTEIN

**PROTEIN** helps our bodies maintain muscle mass and strength, which is crucial for older adults, especially during periods of stress or illness.

- Increase protein in the diet by eating meats, eggs, low-fat dairy foods (milk, yogurt, and cheese), seeds, and nuts
- Consider adding a high-protein oral nutrition supplement to meals and snacks



### FLUIDS

**FLUIDS**, such as water or electrolyte solutions, help to regulate body temperature, maintain fluid balance in cells, and absorb nutrients.

Older adults are at an increased risk for dehydration due to physical changes. Many older adults also worry about incontinence, which can make them hesitant to drink fluids. When older adults are dehydrated, it can negatively affect their mental status, cause dizziness, and increase risk of falls.

- Drink fluids in the morning, before each meal, and an hour before bed
- Keep a water bottle nearby to drink throughout the day, even if they don't feel thirsty
- Discuss with their physician any medications they take since these could affect hydration status, and determine the need for an electrolyte solution to quickly replenish fluids and electrolytes
- Find strategies to adapt to incontinence and consult with their physician about how incontinence can be handled medically

## HELPFUL IDEAS FOR CAREGIVERS



### ASSIST WITH MEAL PLANNING & PREPARATION

- Prepare meals together and store for later
- Shop for groceries together



### MAKE MEALS A SOCIAL EVENT

- Enjoy a meal at a favorite restaurant
- Encourage participating in social programs with members of the community
- Visit during mealtimes



### CONSIDER FOOD COSTS

- Find money-saving shopping approaches, such as visiting grocery store websites ahead of time to look for coupons
- Find resources within the community to help reduce food costs

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