

Determine Your Nutritional Risk¹

Linda B. Bobroff²

The warning signs of poor nutritional health are often overlooked. Use this checklist to see if you and/or someone you care for are at nutritional risk. Circle the number next to each item that applies to you.

Table 1.

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| I have an illness or condition that made me change the kind and/or amount of food I eat. | 2 |
| I eat fewer than 2 meals per day. | 3 |
| I eat few fruits or vegetables, or milk products. | 2 |
| I have 3 or more drinks of beer, liquor, or wine almost every day. | 2 |
| I have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for me to eat. | 2 |
| I don't always have enough money to buy the food I need. | 4 |
| I eat alone most of the time. | 1 |
| I take 3 or more, different prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs a day. | 1 |
| Without wanting to, I lost or gained 10 or more pounds in the last 6 months. | 2 |
| I am not always physically able to shop, cook, and/or feed myself. | 2 |
| Total Your Nutritional Score: | |

Now, look at the following pages to learn more about the warning signs of poor nutritional health and what you can do to improve it. Then check the "What Does Your Nutritional Score Mean?" section to see what your nutritional score means.

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² Written by Linda B. Bobroff, PhD RD, LD/N, Professor. Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Reviewed by Jennifer Hillan, MSH/RD, L/D/N, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Use the word **DETERMINE** to remind you of the warning signs of poor nutritional health. If any of these signs apply to you or someone you care for, read what you can do to decrease your risk of poor nutritional health.

Disease

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| <p>Any disease, illness, or chronic condition that causes you to change the way you eat, or makes it hard for you to eat, puts your nutritional health at risk. People with confusion or memory loss may not remember what, when, or if they have eaten.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Choose foods you can eat. ✓ Use herbs or spices to improve taste. ✓ Eat small meals and snacks. ✓ Use reminders to eat. For example, put a note on your refrigerator. |
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Eating Poorly

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| <p>Eating too little or eating too much can lead to poor health. Eating the same foods day after day, or not eating fruit, vegetables, and milk products daily also can cause poor nutritional health. Also, drinking alcohol can make many health problems worse.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Choose a variety of foods you like. ✓ Have fruit with breakfast and snacks. ✓ Limit alcohol use. ✓ Boost up your meals. For example, add grated carrots to sandwiches or make soups with low-fat milk instead of water. |
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Tooth Loss/Mouth Pain

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| <p>A healthy mouth, teeth, and gums are needed to eat. Missing, loose, or rotten teeth make it hard to eat. So do dentures that don't fit well or cause mouth sores.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Take care of your teeth! ✓ Be sure dentures fit right. ✓ Visit the dentist regularly. ✓ Choose foods you can eat. |
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Economic Hardship

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| <p>As many as 40% of older Americans have incomes of less than \$6,000 per year. Spending less than \$25 to \$30 per week for food makes it very hard to get the foods you need to stay healthy.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use available resources such as food stamps or congregational meal sites. ✓ Share meals with a friend. ✓ Use coupons and buy store brand foods. ✓ Eat less expensive protein foods such as pinto beans, lima beans, kidney beans, and lentils. |
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Reduced Social Contact

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| <p>One-third of all older people live alone. Being with people daily has a positive effect on morale, well-being, and eating habits.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Share meals with a friend. ✓ Eat at congregate meal sites. ✓ Stay in touch with family and friends. |
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Multiple Medicines

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| <p>Many older Americans take medicines, and many take multiple medicines daily. Getting older may change the way the body responds to drugs. The more medicines you take, the greater the chance for side effects. This may include increased or decreased appetite, change in taste, constipation, drowsiness, diarrhea, or nausea. Large doses of vitamins or minerals act like drugs and can cause harm.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Buy all your medicines at one pharmacy. ✓ Talk to your pharmacist about medicines. ✓ Learn about possible interactions with food or other medicines. ✓ Make a list of all your medicines, including vitamin/mineral supplements and over-the-counter medicines. Take this list to all your doctor visits. |
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Involuntary Weight Loss/Gain

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| <p>Losing or gaining a lot of weight when you are not trying to do so is an important warning sign that must not be ignored. Being either overweight or underweight increases your chance of poor health.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eat healthy foods everyday. ✓ Stay active! ✓ Tell your doctor about any change in your appetite and/or weight. |
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Needs Assistance in Self Care

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| <p>Although most older people are able to eat, one of every five has trouble walking, shopping, buying, and/or cooking food.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stay in contact with family and friends. ✓ Take advantage of available services such Meals on Wheels and food delivery programs. |
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Elder Years Above Age 80

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| <p>Most older people lead full and productive lives. But as age increases, risk of frailty and health problems increase.</p> | <p>What you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Check your nutritional health often. ✓ Stay as active as possible. ✓ Treat yourself well with good meals. |
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What Does Your Nutritional Score Mean?

If your score is: 0 to 2

Good!

Recheck your nutritional score in 6 months.

If your score is: 3 to 5

You are at moderate nutritional risk.

See what can be done to improve your eating habits and lifestyle. A registered dietitian (RD), your office on aging, senior nutrition program, senior citizens center, county Extension service, or health department can help. Recheck your nutritional score in 3 months.

If your score is: 6 or higher

You are at high nutritional risk.

Make an appointment to see your doctor, a registered dietitian, or other qualified health or social service professional soon. Bring this checklist to your appointment. Talk with them about any problems you may have. Ask for help to improve your nutritional health. Also, use some of the "What You Can Do" tips for each of the items you checked.

Remember:

Warning signs suggest risk, but do **not** represent diagnosis of any condition.

If you have questions or concerns about your nutritional score, check with your health care provider.

NOTES: