

Fact Sheet 20

Malnutrition

Definition of Malnutrition

Malnutrition in its purest form pertains to a state, where the body is usually over or undernourished. Obesity can be considered to be a state of malnutrition. However, more often than not the term malnutrition is reserved for the state of under nutrition. The main reasons for the body being malnourished can be considered under four main headings:

Decreased Quantity	Decreased Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food availability Rationed food No money for food Food insecurity Too many mouths to feed Poor dentition preventing chewing Mouth pain Poor appetite Poor state of health Depression/PTSD/anxiety Poor mobility and unable to feed self Missing out on food due to work commitments Poor taste Unfamiliarity with foods Poor storage ability of foods leading to spoilage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food availability Rationed food Food insecurity Poor variety Insufficient foods to go around Poor knowledge of nutrition Poor preparation skills cooking methods destroying nutrition intensive farming methods long term storage of foods destroying nutritional content Poor quality foods purchased Alcohol effects Allergies Ritual avoidance Poor vitamin and mineral content High phytate diet causing nutrient binding
Increased Requirements for the body	Increased Losses from the body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infection Fever Parasites Wounds Adolescence Pregnancy lactation Activity/work Exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diarrhoea Vomiting Wound losses i.e. blood loss and protein losses. Stoma losses Drug interactions Liver/kidney disorders HIV Parasites

Protein and energy malnutrition

We all see pictures in the media of young children and infants with insufficient food to eat who have swollen bellies and skinny legs and emaciation. These images are at the extreme ends of malnutrition although can occur quickly in children with insufficient nourishment. Two different types of extreme malnutrition are:

- kwashiorkor (protein malnutrition)
- marasmus (protein and energy malnutrition).

These conditions are generally associated with people in other countries although can and do occur in Australia.

Although we do not necessarily come across severe chronic malnutrition which presents as kwashiorkor or marasmus, refugees are particularly at risk of malnutrition.

Poor quality nutrition versus poor quantity

Poor quality diets are a risk for many people in Australia for a variety of reasons. The quality of nutrition received from the food we eat is affected by our state of health, the variety of foods we consume and the bioavailability of nutrients in our diet.

Infants are particularly at risk of poor quality diets as they only have a reduced capacity for volume of food, and require the quality of the diet to be good in order to receive sufficient nourishment in the small volume that they eat. The key thing to remember for children and infants is low volume high quality, or small amounts but rich in goodness.

Poor quality nutrition is probably one of the most common forms of malnutrition seen in Australia, as oppose to poor quantity. Poor quality diets are often the result of poor knowledge and budgetary restriction. However, often having the monetary resources available is not sufficient to ensure a healthy intake. Often a disposable income can result in a worse quality diet, than restricted funds.

The quality of a diet is considered in terms of its ability to meet all nutrition requirements. There should not be a need for additional supplementation.