

Information for clinicians

Nutrition and Hydration – Spotting the signs of poor nutrition

Poor nutrition and dehydration occur when a person is not eating enough of the right foods or drinking enough fluids. This can increase a patient's risk of a fall, pressure injury and delirium.

Obvious weight loss

- Losing weight unintentionally
- Loose clothes, belts, jewellery or dentures
- Appears underweight
- Looks frail

Complains of gastrointestinal symptoms

- Diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting or constipation

Food Intake

- Loss of appetite: eating less than usual or misses meals
- Meals not being eaten or food rotting (building up in the fridge or freezer)
- Little food in fridge
- Can't use stove or microwave anymore

Fluid Intake

- Drinking less than usual
- Dry mouth, lips, eyes or skin
- Strong smelling urine or prone to urinary tract infections
- Complains of headaches or constipation
- Dizziness

Psychological

- Changes in mood: becoming depressed and lethargic
- Poor concentration and memory, easily distracted
- May appear confused

Muscle Loss

- Collar bone sticks out
- Temple area on head hollowed out
- Muscles wasted between fingers
- Calf muscle wasted and knee prominent
- Looks thin and frail
- Can also be obese with very poor muscle mass and be frail
- Pressure ulcers

Poor oral health

- Tooth loss and decay
- Loose dentures
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Sore or bleeding mouth or gums

Loss of Function

- Feeling weak, tired and less energetic
- Being less physically active
- Difficulty standing and getting out of chairs
- History of falls
- Feels cold, difficulty getting warm

Inability to procure sufficient food

- Being housebound
- Poor income
- Living alone
- Physical or mental health issues

For more information on Comprehensive Care - Minimising Harm Program please see www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au