

Patient/carer information: Food First - Eating well for small appetites

Why do I need this advice?

Many older people or people with some long term conditions are at risk of malnutrition because they cannot, or do not, eat enough food to meet their body's needs.

Malnutrition increases risk of illness and makes it harder for the body to fight infection and heal itself, so it will take longer to recover from any illness. Malnutrition can also reduce energy levels, muscle strength, mobility and can weaken the heart.

The most common type of malnutrition in the UK is "protein-energy" malnutrition – which just means that not enough protein or energy (calories) is eaten.

To treat protein-energy malnutrition our bodies need us to increase the amount of protein and energy (calories) which we eat every day.

People who are at risk of malnutrition will generally need to eat at least another 500 calories per day (in addition to their current intake) to stop losing weight and/or to help them regain weight. **See page 6 for a quick guide to increasing intake by 500 calories a day.**

An increased protein intake can generally be achieved by choosing snacks and drinks containing protein, as well as eating protein foods at meals.

Treating and preventing malnutrition can be very simple, and normal food plays a big part – this approach is known as 'food first'. Food first just means using ordinary foods to increase intake of all the nutrients your body needs. The following advice aims to help you to do this.

What about healthy eating?

When someone is at risk of malnutrition, 'normal' healthy eating guidelines (eating a diet low in fat and sugar, avoiding snacking between meals etc) do not apply.

The advice that follows is 'eating for health' for someone at risk of malnutrition, but may not be healthy for their family and friends.

Some of the following advice recommends eating some foods that are high in fat. Many people who have malnutrition worry that if they eat more high fat foods that this will harm their heart. However, malnutrition itself is a big risk to heart health, so treating malnutrition can actually help to strengthen the heart.

What do I need to eat?

Our bodies need us to eat a range of different foods every day.

These include:

- Starchy carbohydrate such as bread, pasta, rice, cereals, potatoes
- Protein such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans/lentils, Quorn, soya
- Milk and milk containing foods such as yogurt, fromage frais, cheese
- Fruit and vegetables
- Fluid

For people with small appetites it can sometimes be difficult to eat enough of these foods. However **there are many simple changes that can help make sure that you can eat enough to meet your body's needs.**

- Aim to eat an extra 500 calories every day. The following information will show you the energy content of many common foods and drinks

- **Try to eat little and often during the day**
 - Aim for about 3 small meals and 2-3 between meal snacks each day
- Try to have 2-3 portions of high protein foods (see above for examples) every day. In addition try to have foods and drinks based on milk, as milk is also a good source of protein
- Try to have a serving of starchy food (see above for examples) at each meal
- Try to have some fruit and vegetables every day – aim for 5 small portions per day
- **Use full fat milk and fortify it** (increase its energy and protein content) by mixing 3 - 4 tablespoons dried skimmed milk powder into each pint of milk
 - Try to take about 1 pint of this fortified milk each day by using it where you would use ordinary milk (with cereal; in tea, coffee, hot chocolate and milkshakes; in custard etc)

- **Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses/mugs of fluid every day.** Try to choose high energy drinks from the list overleaf
- **Avoid low fat, low sugar and diet foods and drinks**
- Try homemade supplements (see recipe on page 5) or commercial supplements such as Complian, Meritene Energis or Aymes Retail between meals (these are available in neutral, sweet and savoury flavours) in between meals, with or instead of snacks
- If your appetite is very small or you cannot eat a range of different foods it is a good idea to take a once-a-day multivitamin and mineral tablet and 'own brands' are not expensive. These are available from most supermarkets and pharmacies. Consult your GP or a Pharmacist to check this will be safe to take with other medications

How can I make mealtimes easier?

- If cooking is difficult for you or your carer, try ready prepared meals from the supermarket or delivered to your door e.g. Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS) (0330 2000 103), Wiltshire Farm Foods (0800 773 773) or Oakhouse Foods (0845 643 2009). All Meals on Wheels in Hertfordshire are provided by HILS.
- **Avoid drinks with or shortly before a meal/snack** to avoid feeling too full to eat
- A small alcoholic drink before a meal can help to stimulate your appetite and is also high in energy, but make sure that it is safe to drink alcohol with any medication that you are taking
- **Serve small portions** as these can be easier to manage than larger portions – you can always go back for a second helping

- **Choose foods which you know you enjoy**
- If you are a slow eater, **give yourself enough time to eat your meals and snacks.** To keep your food warm while eating try to serve hot food on a warmed plate or try commercially available heated dishes or plate warmers
- **Try to eat with others** as this can help to encourage appetite, and try to make sure that where you eat is as pleasant as possible
- The expression “we eat with our eyes” is true - **try to make sure that your meals and snacks look appealing** (try to choose a variety of colours, flavours and textures) as appearance of food can affect appetite

How can I increase the energy and protein in my food?

If you have a small appetite, fortifying foods - by adding extra energy, protein and other nutrients to them - can make it easier for you to eat enough every day.

- **Breakfast:** Try fortifying breakfast cereal with fortified milk, dried fruit, ground almonds, evaporated milk, cream, sugar, syrup or honey
- Try fortifying bread or toast with plenty of butter or margarine and jam, marmalade, lemon curd, chocolate spread or cream cheese
- **Main meals:** Try fortifying meat dishes with grated cheese, cream cheese, mayonnaise, skimmed milk powder, butter/margarine, cream, or milk based sauces
- Try fortifying potatoes and vegetables with milk based sauces made with fortified milk, cream cheese, mayonnaise, grated cheese or butter/margarine,
- Try fortifying puddings with condensed milk, ice cream, evaporated milk, custard made with fortified milk, honey, syrup or cream
- **Lighter meals:** Try fortifying soup with skimmed milk powder, evaporated milk, grated cheese, nut butter, ground almonds or cream,
- Try fortifying sandwiches with plenty of mayonnaise, cream cheese, nut butter or butter/ margarine, in addition to sandwich fillings

This table shows the amount of energy and protein that can be added using everyday food items:

Fortifier	Amount	Energy content (calories)	Protein content (grams)
Butter or margarine	10g square	75	0
Cheese, grated	1 tablespoon	40	2.5
Chocolate, grated or melted	1 square	35	0.5
Coconut milk powder/ creamed coconut	1 tablespoon	103	1
Coconut (desiccated)	1 tablespoon	60	0.5
Condensed milk	1 dessert spoon	55	1.5
Cream cheese	1 tablespoon	66	0.5
Cream, single/double	1 tablespoon	30/100	0.5
Crème fraiche	1 tablespoon	100	0.5
Dried fruit	1 tablespoon	85	0
Dried skimmed milk powder	1 tablespoon	55	5.5
Egg, pasteurised	1 'egg'	75	6
Evaporated milk	1 tablespoon	25	1
Greek yogurt	1 tablespoon	61	2
Ground almonds	1 tablespoon	60	2
Halva	1 tablespoon	137	3.5
Honey	1 teaspoon	50	0
Hot drink powder e.g. Horlicks, Ovaltine etc	4 teaspoons	75	1.5 - 2
Ice cream	1 scoop	105	2
Jam	1 teaspoon	50	0
Milk/cream based sauces	1 tablespoon	45	1
Milkshake powder	4 teaspoons	60	0
Mayonnaise	1 tablespoon	105	0
Nut butter e.g. peanut, almond, cashew	1 dessert spoon	75	2.5
Sugar	1 teaspoon	25	0
Sweet sauces	1 tablespoon	60	0
Syrup	1 teaspoon	50	0

Which snacks should I choose?

- Even the smallest snack can help boost your energy and protein intake
- Try to have 2 - 3 small snacks each day as well as your meals and try to **choose a variety of different snacks**

This table shows the amount of energy and protein that some common snacks contain:

Snack	Amount	Energy content (calories)	Protein content (grams)
Cocktail sausage	1	29	1.5
Milk chocolate	1 square	36	0.5
Mini sausage roll	1	54	1.5
Cream biscuit	1	63	0.5
Digestive biscuit*	1	70	1
Mini Scotch egg	1	72	3.5
Chocolate digestive	1	89	1
Chocolate mini roll	1	97	1
Rice pudding**	1 small tub	102	4
¼ sandwich with pate*	½ slice bread + thick spreading pate	111	4
Cheese & cracker*	1 cracker + small chunk cheese	112	5.5
Mini pork pie	1	118	3
Chocolate biscuit	1 individually wrapped	120	1.5
Peanuts	1 dessert spoon	120	5
Custard**	1 small tub	122	3.5
Crisps	1 small packet	133	1.5
Malt loaf with butter	1 slice	138	2.5
½ scone + butter & jam	½ scone	143	1.5
Cereal bar	1	154	3.5
½ toasted teacake + butter	½	167	2.5
Trifle	1 small tub	188	3
Flapjack	Small piece	197	2
Thick & creamy yoghurt**	1 pot	230	5
Custard tart	1 small	260	6

*Energy content can be increased by fortifying with cream cheese, nut butter, butter or margarine

**Energy and protein content can be increased by fortifying with dried skimmed milk powder



What about drinks?

- Try to choose mainly high energy drinks from the table below, rather than lower energy drinks like water, tea, sugar free squash or sugar free fizzy drinks
- High energy drinks can make a big difference to your energy and protein intake

This table shows the amount of energy and protein that some ordinary drinks contain:

High energy drinks per 200ml (1 small mug)	Energy content (calories)	Protein content (grams)
Complan*	310	12.5
Homemade fortified milkshake	305	17
Aymes Retail*	265	8.2
Meritene Energis*	247	16.5
Horlicks*	235	9
Ovaltine*	230	8.5
Fortified milk (see page 2)*	200	12.5
Milkshake*	200	7
Hot Chocolate*	180	7
Bournvita*	170	8.5
Cocoa*	168	7
Full Fat Milk	140	7
Milky coffee*	140	5
Fortified soup	115 – 170	Depends on fortification
Fruit juice	65 – 120	0
Smoothie	100	0.5
Sugary fizzy drink	85	0
Sugary squash	50 - 90	0

*Made with full fat milk

Homemade fortified milkshake/Ovaltine recipe

Ingredients

- ½ pint/180ml full fat milk
- 2 generous tablespoons (30g) skimmed milk powder
- 4 heaped teaspoons (20g) vitamin fortified milkshake powder (Nesquik, Asda Milkshake Mix, Morrisons Milkshake Mix or Lidl Goody Cao) **OR** 5 heaped teaspoons (25g) 'Ovaltine Original Add Milk' powder/'Horlicks Original Add Milk' powder



Make sure you follow the recipe exactly as other milkshake flavourings or hot drink powders won't contain the same vitamins & minerals

Directions

Mix milk powder & milkshake powder together in a glass. Gradually mix in milk and stir well.

1 portion = 220ml

Serve 2 portions per day

Product comparison	Calories per portion	Protein per portion	Cost per portion
Homemade fortified milkshake	305	17g	£0.40
Complan + full fat milk	310	12.5	£1.02
Meritene + full fat milk	247	16.6	£1.15

Following the advice in this leaflet should help you improve your food intake and prevent further weight loss.

If you are not able to follow this advice or you are still losing weight after a month of following this advice, contact your Dietitian, District or Practice Nurse or GP for further support.

Putting 'food first' into practice - Quick guide to increasing intake by 500 calories a day

People who are at risk of malnutrition generally need to eat at least another 500 calories per day (in addition to their current intake) to stop losing weight and/or to help them regain weight.

Increasing your intake by 500 calories per day can seem quite daunting, but it is surprising how easy it can be.

The following are simple suggestions which may help you to increase your intake by 500 calories per day.

In addition to your usual intake, try the following:

• If you like milk and milk products - every day: Total **582 calories**

Drink 1 extra glass (200ml) of full fat milk 140 calories

Use fortified milk (see page 2) on cereal & in all cups of tea & coffee 110 calories

Eat 2 small snacks in between meals e.g. 1 tub of rice pudding & 1 thick and creamy yogurt 332 calories

• If you don't like or cannot take milk and milk products - every day: Total **499 calories**

Drink 1 extra glass (200ml) of fruit smoothie 100 calories

Have 1 extra teaspoon of jam on bread or toast 50 calories

Eat 2 small snacks in between your meals e.g. 1 cereal bar & 1 dessertspoon peanuts 274 calories

At your main meal, fortify vegetables and potatoes with 2 teaspoons margarine 75 calories

• If you have a sweet tooth - every day: Total **516 calories**

Drink 1 extra glass (200ml) of fruit juice 80 calories

Eat 2 small snacks in between your meals e.g. 1 chocolate mini roll & 2 cream biscuits 223 calories

Have an extra small pudding after lunch or tea e.g. 1 individual trifle 188 calories

Add 1 extra teaspoon of sugar to your cereal or hot drinks 25 calories

• If you prefer savoury flavours - every day: Total **571 calories**

Have 2 small snacks in between your meals e.g. 1 mini pork pie and 1 packet of crisps 251 calories

At your main meal, fortify vegetables and potatoes with 1 tablespoon of grated cheese 40 calories

Drink 1 extra mug (200ml) of instant soup made with hot, fortified milk (page 2) instead of water 280 calories

• If you have a very small appetite - every day: Total **506 calories**

Drink 1 extra cup (150ml) of hot chocolate (made with fortified milk – see page 2) 190 calories

Have 3 very small snacks in between your meals e.g. 2 cocktail sausages, 2 squares of milk chocolate & ½ a tub of custard 191 calories

Fortify custard with 1 teaspoon honey 50 calories

Fortify your main meal with 2 teaspoons butter or margarine 75 calories

Leaflet provided by:

Profession:.....

Contact number:.....

Date:.....

Version	2.0
Developed by	Alison Smith, Prescribing Support Consultant Dietitian, Herts Valleys CCG
Date ratified by HMMC	Version 1.0 June 2018; Version 2.0 July 2020
Review date	June 2021