



# DETERMINE YOUR NUTRITIONAL HEALTH

*The warning signs of poor nutritional health are often overlooked. Use this checklist to find out if you or someone you know is at nutritional risk.*

Read the statements below. Circle the number in the yes column for those that apply to you or someone you know. Add the numbers you circled and write the total in the last box.

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

### Total Your Nutritional Score. If it's—

- 0 - 2**      **Good!** Recheck your nutritional score in 6 months.
- 3 - 5**      **You are at moderate nutritional risk.** See what can be done to improve your eating habits and lifestyle. Your office on aging, senior nutrition program, senior citizens center or health department can help. Recheck your nutritional score in 3 months.
- 6 or more** **You are at high nutritional risk.** Bring this checklist the next time you see your doctor, dietitian or other qualified health or social service professional. Talk with them about any problems you may have. Ask for help to improve.

Adapted with permission from the Nutrition Screening Initiative, a project of the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Dietetic Association and the National Council on the Aging, Inc.

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## **I have an illness or condition that made me change the kind and/or amount of food I eat.**

Changes in your eating habits make it difficult for you to get all the nutrients you need. Good nutrition helps the body resist diseases and recover more quickly if illness does strike.

- Visit your physician regularly (at least once a year).
- Avoid using vitamin and mineral supplements without medical advice.
- Use medications only as directed.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day, even if you're not thirsty.
- Try to stay near your healthy body weight.
- Stay physically active.

## **I eat fewer than 2 meals per day.**

Eating only once a day makes it almost impossible to get the variety of foods and nutrients you need to stay healthy.

- Try not to snack all day so you will be hungry at mealtime.
- Eat at usual times since hunger pangs may not come. If necessary, set an alarm to remind you to eat.
- Eat with friends or in a cheerful environment.
- Cook meals ahead so that when you are too tired to cook, you only need to defrost or reheat your meal.
- Keep easy to fix items (fruits, milk or yogurt, cereals, soups, cheese and crackers, peanut butter and whole wheat bread) on hand.

## **I eat few fruits or vegetables, or milk products.**

Fruits and vegetables provide many important vitamins and minerals plus dietary fiber which is important for proper bowel function.

Here are some tips to help you add fruits and vegetables to your daily diet.

- Choose fruits for snacks between meals.
- Use fresh or canned fruit slices as a colorful garnish for main dishes, salads and cereals.
- Eat fresh fruits topped with yogurt or cottage cheese and sprinkled with cinnamon.
- Blend fresh, frozen or canned fruit with milk for a fruit shake.
- Top angel food cake with fresh, frozen or canned fruit.
- Bake or broil apples, pears or bananas with cinnamon and nutmeg; fruit tastes even sweeter when eaten while warm.
- Add vegetables to soups, stews or casseroles.
- Mix several kinds of vegetables for an interesting medley.
- Buy frozen vegetables in bags. You can use them as needed and store the rest for later use.
- Use herbs and lemon juice to season vegetables.

Milk products provide a variety of nutrients including calcium. A diet low in calcium may lead to osteoporosis which weakens bones and often leads to painful and disabling fractures. Below are some tips to help you increase the amount of milk products in your daily diet.

- Add nonfat dry milk to soups, stews and casseroles.
- Eat low-fat yogurt and cottage cheese as a snack or with meals.
- Prepare canned soup with milk instead of water.
- For calcium-rich desserts select ice milk, frozen yogurt, custards and puddings made with milk.
- If you are unable to drink milk, consult with a physician or dietitian about your need for additional calcium.

## **I have 3 or more drinks of beer, liquor or wine almost every day.**

Many health problems become worse if you drink more than one or two alcoholic beverages per day. These problems may:

- lead to malnutrition because you are replacing food with alcohol,
- increase your risk of falls and accidents,
- cause permanent damage to the brain and central nervous system and to the liver, heart, kidneys and stomach,
- make it difficult for your doctor to diagnose certain medical problems,
- mask pain that may otherwise serve as a warning sign of a medical problem such as a heart attack,
- cause problems similar to dementia and confusion,
- cause undesirable side effects when mixed with prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

If you think alcohol may be a problem for you, seek help from a state or local social services agency.

## **I have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for me to eat.**

A healthy mouth, teeth and gums are necessary for eating. Missing, loose or rotten teeth or dentures which don't fit well or cause mouth sores make it hard to eat.

- Have regular dental checkups whether you have natural teeth or dentures.
- Brush your teeth thoroughly at least twice daily.
- Floss your teeth at least once daily.
- Brush all denture surfaces with a denture care product each day.

- To relieve dry mouth, drink extra water and avoid sugary snacks, caffeinated beverages, tobacco, and alcohol.

If you have difficulty chewing:

- Cook meat slowly in broth to make it tender.
- Cut or chop meat into small pieces before you cook it.
- Try softer meat substitutes such as beans, eggs, cottage cheese or cheese.
- Try steaming vegetables so they are tender.
- Chop vegetables so your teeth have less work to do.
- Try putting vegetables in the blender or mashing them with a potato masher.

## **I don't always have enough money to buy the food I need.**

- Decide what foods you need **BEFORE** shopping, make a list.
- Check the newspaper for "specials".
- Compare ads and clip coupons.
- Compare prices between brands.
- Loose-pack frozen fruits and vegetables allow you to remove a serving and return the unused portion to the freezer.
- Buy whole chickens or roasts, which are usually cheaper, and cut them up yourself.
- Take advantage of 'economy' packs of meat, poultry and fish. Wrap these in individual-size servings and freeze.
- Shop with a friend. Share a head of lettuce or a bunch of broccoli instead of letting it spoil in your refrigerator.

## **I eat alone most of the time.**

It is important that eating alone does not become an excuse for eating poorly.

- Take turns eating with other single friends.
- Prepare full recipes for casseroles or other dishes, freeze individual portions for later use.
- Eat a meal or two at a community center for good food and companionship.
- Eat near a window or with television, radio or reading material to enhance your meal.
- Attend church or benefit dinners.
- Ask your pastor for names of shut-ins who may enjoy company at meals.
- Offer to help at a hospital or nursing home. Volunteers often receive meals for their services.
- Treat yourself well. Would you be eating the same foods if you were cooking for a family?

## **I take 3 or more different prescribed or over-the-counter drugs a day.**

Medications can cause dangerous drug and food interactions.

- Always tell the doctor about past problems with drugs.
- When starting to take a new drug, ask the doctor or pharmacist about the side effects that may occur.

- Take the exact amount of any drugs prescribed by the doctor and follow the dosage schedule as closely as possible.
- Ask your pharmacist or dietitian if you should avoid certain foods and beverages when taking any medications.
- Never take drugs prescribed for someone else.
- If you use more than one pharmacy, take all of your medications to one pharmacist to evaluate possible interactions.
- Discard out-dated medicines.

## **Without wanting to, I have lost or gained 10 pounds in the last 6 months.**

Being overweight or underweight increases your chance of health complications. A sudden weight change may signal a health problem. You should seek immediate medical attention.

## **I am not always physically able to shop, cook and/or feed myself.**

Impaired functional abilities may increase your risk of malnutrition.

- If shopping is a problem, order foods from the local market by phone and have them delivered.
- Call you local senior center or State Agency on Aging for information

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