

# The “tea and toast syndrome”

The ‘tea and toast syndrome’ refers to malnutrition in seniors due to their lack of desire or inability to prepare and/or eat proper meals, relying instead on simple fare such as tea and toast.



## The main factors that put seniors at risk for malnutrition



Gaining or losing more than 10 pounds (4.5 kg) in the past six months



Reporting that they skipped meals “almost every day”

## Signs and symptoms of malnutrition

- Unexplained weight loss
- Tiredness and fatigue (lack of energy)
- Muscle weakness or loss of strength
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Gastritis
- Peptic ulcers
- Paleness of the skin
- Poor wound healing
- Depression
- Problems with memory
- A weak immune system
- Anemia

## Issues that can lead to malnutrition in seniors



**34%**

of seniors are at nutritional risk with women (38%) at a greater risk than men (29%).



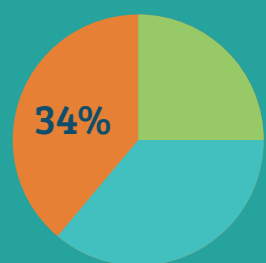
The more types of medications people used on a daily basis, the more likely they were to be at nutritional risk.

**44%**

of people with moderate or severe disability were at nutritional risk, compared with 27% of those with no or mild disability.



Seniors with bad teeth or ill-fitting dentures may have difficulty chewing and swallowing food.



**>4.1 M**

In 2008/2009, 34% of Canadians aged 65 or older (more than 4.1 million) were at nutritional risk.



**50%**

Living alone raised one’s nutritional risk, with almost half of seniors living at home alone at risk, compared to only 28% of those living with others.

## Ways to prevent malnutrition in seniors

- Ask them what they eat and spend time with them during meals to observe their eating habits.
- Help them monitor their weight at home.
- Check their refrigerator and pantry to find out the type and quantity of food they have.
- Encourage healthy food choices for meals and snacks. Snacking on a piece of fruit or cheese, a spoonful of peanut butter or a fruit smoothie is a good way to get extra nutrients and calories between meals.
- For a nutrient-rich diet, spread peanut or other nut butters on toast and crackers; sprinkle finely chopped nuts or wheat germ on yogurt, fruit and cereal; add extra egg whites to scrambled eggs and omelets; use whole milk; add cheese to sandwiches, vegetables, soups, rice and noodles.
- Use lemon juice, herbs and spices to flavour bland foods.
- If they have trouble chewing raw vegetables or fruit, they can juice or mince fresh produce or use canned or frozen fruits and vegetables.
- Use nutritional supplements such as multivitamins with a doctor’s approval.
- Make homemade soups which can be just as nutritious as a meal. If your loved one is not feeling well or unwilling to eat, meat and vegetable broths are a temporary option that may be better tolerated.
- Ask a doctor or pharmacist if your loved one’s medications could cause a loss of appetite.
- If they are depressed or an alcoholic, help them seek treatment.
- Speak to their doctor if you observe any signs of poor nutrition. You might also ask for a referral to a registered dietitian.
- Encourage them to exercise to improve their appetite and keep bones and muscles strong.
- Try to encourage social activities and meals with friends and family. Drop in for meals or invite them to your home or out to a restaurant. Perhaps find programs where they can socialize and eat with others, such as at a community or senior’s centre.
- Provide cost-savings tips if they are concerned about spending money on groceries. Make a shopping list, check store flyers and choose less expensive brands.
- You could also consider a meal delivery service like Meals on Wheels.
- Consider using a meal replacement supplement suitable for older adults but these should not regularly replace well-balanced meals. Speak to their doctor first.



### Getting help

Bayshore Home Health provides assistance with grocery shopping, meal preparation and light clean-up. To find out more about the meal preparation and home care services we offer, call us at 1-877-289-3997 or email us today at [clientservice@bayshore.ca](mailto:clientservice@bayshore.ca).