

Causes of Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a condition where the diet is not balanced resulting with a deficiency disease. It happens worldwide but can be more common to developing countries, as economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions all have an influence

Malnutrition is a broad term which refers to both under nutrition and over nutrition. Individuals are malnourished or suffer from under nutrition if their diet does not provide them with sufficient calories and protein for maintenance and growth or they cannot fully utilize the food they eat due to illness. People are malnourished or suffer from over nutrition if they consume too many calories.

Malnutrition occurs when the body does not get enough vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients it needs to maintain healthy tissues and organ function. Both undernourished and over-nourished people can suffer from malnutrition. Under nutrition is a consequence of consuming too few essential nutrients or using or excreting them more rapidly than they can be replaced.

Insufficient food intake is the most common cause of malnutrition worldwide. In some areas, cultural and religious food customs may play a role. Inadequate sanitation further endangers children by increasing the risk of infectious diseases that increase nutritional losses and alters metabolic demands.

People who are chronically malnourished lack the nutrients needed for proper health and development. Someone can be malnourished for a long or short period of time, and the condition may be mild or severe. People who are malnourished are more likely to get sick and, in severe cases, might even die. Malnutrition commonly occurs when someone does not eat enough food (sub-nutrition). It can also occur if a person has a poor diet that gives them the wrong balance of the basic food groups.

It is possible for an obese person whose diet consists mainly of fast food to be malnourished because the type of food they eat lacks the nutrients that their body requires.

Malnutrition can be caused by hunger, protein-energy malnutrition and over consumption. People who don't get enough food often experience hunger, and hunger can lead to malnutrition over the long term. But someone can

become malnourished for reasons that have nothing to do with hunger. Even people who have plenty to eat may be malnourished if they don't eat food that provides the right nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. An inadequate diet can also lead to a person having a deficiency of one or more vitamins, minerals or other essential substances, which can lead to conditions such as scurvy.

([Mary L. Gavin, MD](#), Kidshealth)

In the UK, it is estimated that at least two million people are affected by malnutrition. Anyone can become malnourished if, over a prolonged period of time, they do not eat enough food, or if they have an unhealthy diet. The groups who are most at risk of malnutrition are:

- the elderly, particularly those who are in hospital or institutionalised,
- people with low incomes or who are socially isolated,
- people with chronic (long-term) disorders, for example eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, and
- people who are recovering from a serious illness or condition, particularly a condition that affects their ability to eat, such as a stroke.

Some people become malnourished because they have a disease or condition that prevents them from digesting or absorbing their food properly. For example, someone with celiac disease has intestinal problems that are triggered by a protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, rye, and barley. Celiac disease can interfere with the intestine's ability to absorb nutrients, which may result in nutritional deficiencies.

Signs and symptoms of malnutrition

Loss of fat, breathing, depression, higher risk of complications after surgery, longer healing times for wounds, poor growth, problems with organ function, learning difficulties, underweight, longer recovery from illness and tiredness. In more severe cases skin may become thin, dry, pale and cold. Hair becomes dry and fall out easily. If lack of calorie continues for long enough, there may be heart and liver failure.

References:

www.medicalnewstoday.com

www.who.int

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/feeding/hunger.html>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Malnutrition/Pages/Introduction.aspx>