

Healthy Living: DETERMINE Your Nutritional Health¹

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The warning signs of poor nutritional health are often overlooked. Use this checklist to see if you and/or someone you care for may be at nutritional risk. Circle the number next to each item that applies to you.

Now, look at the following pages to learn more about the warning signs of poor nutritional health and what you can do to improve your nutritional health. Then check the “What Does Your Nutritional Score Mean?” section to see what your nutritional score means.

Table 1. DETERMINE checklist

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

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Disease

Any disease, illness, or chronic condition that causes you to change the way you eat, or makes it hard for you to eat, puts your nutritional health at risk. People with confusion or memory loss may not remember what, when, or if they have eaten.

What you can do:

- Choose foods you are able to eat.
- Use herbs or spices to improve taste.
- Eat small meals and snacks.
- Use reminders to eat; for example, put a note on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror.

Eating Poorly

Eating too little or eating too much can lead to poor health. Eating the same foods day after day, or not eating fruits, vegetables, and milk products daily also can cause poor nutritional health. Also, drinking alcohol can make many health problems worse.

What you can do:

- Choose a variety of foods you like.
- Have fruit with breakfast and snacks.
- Limit alcohol use.
- Boost up your meals; for example, add grated carrots to sandwiches or make soups with low-fat milk instead of water.

Tooth Loss/Mouth Pain

We need a healthy mouth, teeth, and gums to be able to eat a variety of foods. Missing, loose, or rotten teeth make it hard to eat; so do dentures that don't fit well or cause mouth sores.

What you can do:

- Take care of your teeth and gums!
- Be sure your dentures fit right.
- Visit the dentist regularly.
- Choose foods you are able to eat.

Economic Hardship

About one in ten Americans over age 65 (over 4 million people) live in poverty. Spending less than about \$40 per week for food makes it very hard to get the foods you need to stay healthy.

What you can do:

- Use available resources such as food stamps (SNAP).
- Share meals with a friend.
- Use coupons and buy store brand foods.
- Eat less expensive protein foods, such as lentils, eggs, and pinto, lima, and kidney beans.



Reduced Social Contact

Just over one-fourth of all people over 65 years old live alone. Being with people daily has a positive effect on morale, well-being, and eating habits.

What you can do:

- Share meals with a friend.
- Eat at congregate meal sites or senior centers.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.

Multiple Medications

Many Americans over 65 years old take multiple medications daily. Getting older may change the way the body responds to certain drugs. The more medicines you take, the greater the chance for side effects. This may include increased or decreased appetite, change in taste, constipation, drowsiness, diarrhea, or nausea. Large doses of vitamins or minerals act like drugs and also can cause harm.

What you can do:

- Buy all medicines at one pharmacy.
- Talk to your pharmacist about the medicines you take.
- Learn about possible interactions between foods and medicines you take.
- Make a list of all your medicines, including vitamin/mineral supplements and over-the-counter medicines. Take this list to all your doctor visits.

Involuntary Weight Loss/Gain

Losing or gaining weight when you are not trying to do so is an important warning sign that must **not** be ignored. Also, being either overweight or underweight increases your chance of poor health.

What you can do:

- Eat healthy foods every day.
- Stay as active as you can.
- Tell your doctor about any change in your appetite and/or weight.

Needs Assistance in Self Care

The majority of older people are able to eat and take care of themselves. However, almost one half of people age 65 or older have trouble walking, shopping, buying and cooking food, and/or eating.

What you can do:

- Stay in contact with family and friends.
- Take advantage of available services such as Meals on Wheels and food delivery programs from grocery stores or online food companies.

Elder Years Above Age 80

Most older people lead full and productive lives. But as age increases, risk of frailty and health problems increase.

What you can do:

- Check your nutritional health often.
- Stay as active as possible.
- Treat yourself well with good meals.

What Does Your Nutritional Score Mean?

If your score is: 0 to 2

Good!

Recheck your nutritional score in 6 months.

If your score is: 3 to 5

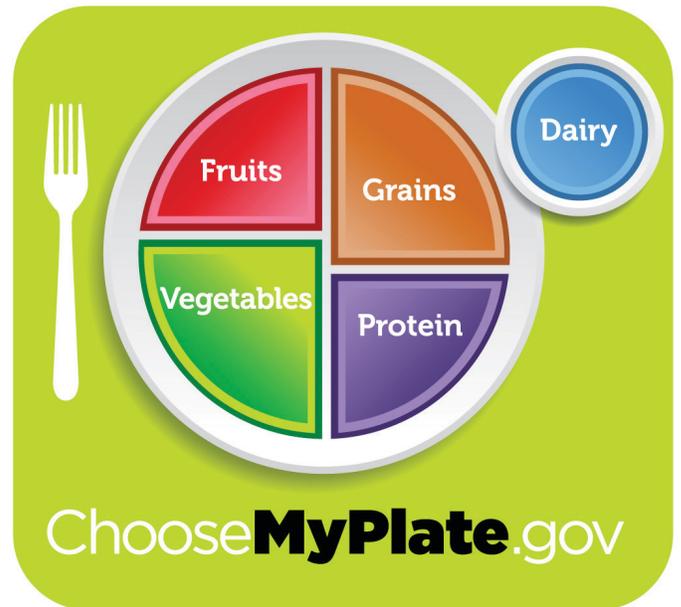
You are at moderate nutritional risk.

See what you can do to improve your eating habits and lifestyle. A registered dietitian (RD), your office on aging, senior nutrition program, senior citizens center, county Extension service, or health department may be able to help. Recheck your nutritional score in three months.

If your score is: 6 or higher

You are at high nutritional risk.

Make an appointment to see your doctor, a registered dietitian, or other qualified health or social service professional soon. Bring this checklist to your appointment. Talk with them about any problems you may have. Ask for help to improve your nutritional health. Also, use some of the “What You Can Do” tips for each of the items you circled.



Remember

- Warning signs suggest risk, but do **not** represent diagnosis of any condition.
- If you have questions or concerns about your nutritional score, check with your health care provider.

References

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