



Main Causes of Hospital Malnutrition

Malnutrition Frequency Caused by Various and Diverse Factors

Reduced food and nutrient intake due to disability and disease are the key reasons for hospital malnutrition. In addition, other factors can cause and exacerbate hospital malnutrition such as:^{1,2,3}

- Patient-related conditions
- Organizational conditions
- Health care staff-related conditions

Each of these factors can result in a lack of sufficient energy and nutrient intake by the patient. ¹

Patient-Related Conditions: When Food Intake is Insufficient

Some patients might not intake the recommended amount of nutrients due to various reasons, leading to malnutrition: ⁴

- Anorexia, taste disturbances, nausea, vomiting, chewing and swallowing difficulties, confusion, depression, medication, treatment induced side effects, e.g. from chemotherapy or surgical intervention
- Inability to self-feed or the impact of poor dental health

Patients may consume adequate amount of nutrients and still lose weight for reasons including: ⁴

- Impaired nutrient digestion and absorption, particularly in gastrointestinal (GI) diseases
- Increased nutritional requirements resulting from sepsis, trauma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), endocrine disorders, or cancer
- Increased weight losses resulting from enhanced catabolism, malabsorption, intestinal (fistula) or wound secretions

Other Factors: Staff and Organizational Influences on Hospital Malnutrition

Beyond patient-related conditions, malnutrition can also be impacted by health care staff or organizational factors which fail to sufficiently address the problem.

Staff-related issues often include lack of education and training on identifying and treating hospital malnutrition,^{2,3} poor documentation, insufficient screening procedures, treatment actions, and follow-up monitoring. On the organizational side, lack of nutrition policy, poor organization of nutrition services, catering limitations and lack of specialist posts can contribute to hospital malnutrition.¹

References

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4. National Collaborating Centre for Acute Care (UK). Nutrition Support for Adults Oral Nutrition Support, Enteral Tube Feeding and Parenteral Nutrition. NICE Clinical Guidelines, No. 32 London 2006.