

Basic Nutrition Care Plan: For Healthcare Providers

The **Basic Nutrition Care Plan** should be initiated after a patient is identified to be at moderate or high nutrition risk using nutrition screening. This plan is recommended when at-risk patients are waiting for a consult with a registered dietitian, or do not have access to a registered dietitian.

STEP 1: EDUCATE AND DOCUMENT

Educate the patient and informal caregiver(s) about the risk factors, signs, and consequences of poor nutrition.

Document the nutrition screening results and care plan.

Risk factors that affect nutrition:

- Low income
- Limited or no transportation
- Existing medical conditions and medications
- Loss of taste or smell
- Difficulty chewing and swallowing
- Social isolation or depression
- Mobility limitations
- Cognitive impairment

Signs of poor nutrition:

- Unintentional weight loss
- Poor appetite
- Weakness and fatigue
- Feeling cold frequently
- Low mood or depression
- Increased length and frequency of infectious illnesses

Consequences of poor nutrition:

- Unable to meet protein, vitamin, mineral, and energy requirements
- Unintentional weight loss
- Increased risk of hospitalization
- Increased risk of chronic disease
- Increased muscle and bone loss
- Decreased immunity
- Loss of independence
- Poor quality of life

STEP 2: INVESTIGATE

Investigate risk factors, etiology, and diagnoses that may cause or exacerbate poor nutrition.

Perform supplementary screening to identify risk factors for poor nutrition. Refer to specialists or recommend resources as needed.

- **Difficulty swallowing** → refer to a registered dietitian or another swallowing specialist
- **Poor dentition or difficulty chewing** → refer to a dentist
- **Difficulty cooking** → refer to homecare or meal programs
- **Poverty** → apply for financial subsidy and assistance
- **Social isolation** → recommend a congregate dining program

Etiologies and diagnoses relevant to poor nutrition and appetite:

- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Cancer
- Depression, social isolation, or grief
- Cognitive impairment
- Medications affecting taste, appetite, and/or metabolism
- Mobility limitations

STEP 3: PROMOTE

Promote a “food is medicine” approach that encourages the patient to eat healthy foods and maintain a healthy weight.

Tips to support appetite, and promote weight gain or maintenance:

- Eat when **appetite is best** (e.g., after physical activity)
- Eat foods high in **energy, protein, and nutrients** every 2-3 hours
- Eat **with others**, and flavour food with **herbs/ spices**
- Use **oral nutritional supplements** if appetite continues to be poor

Tips to help patients recover from poor nutrition:

- **Track weight** at home using a scale, and keep a record
- **Track which foods** are eaten, how often, and how much

STEP 4: REFER AND RECOMMEND

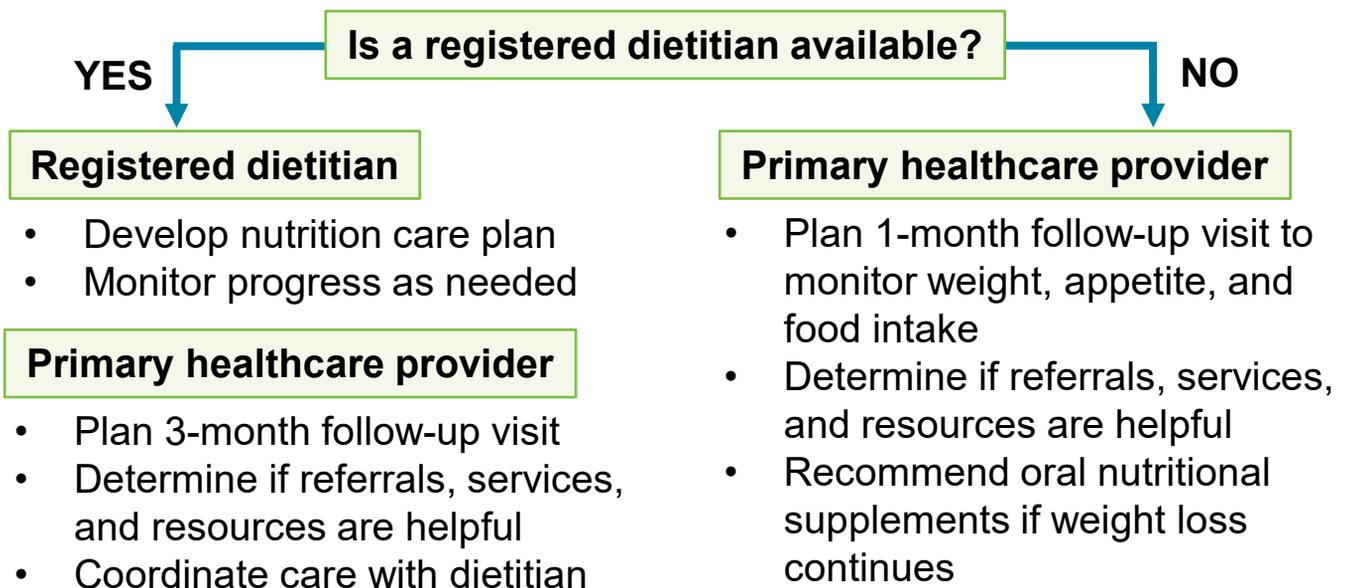
Refer patients who are at risk to a registered dietitian for tailored, individualized nutrition counseling. Registered dietitians provide nutrition therapy **tailored to each individual's healthcare needs, preferences, culture, and life circumstances.**

Recommend community services and healthy eating resources based on the patient's nutrition status, healthcare needs, preferences, culture, and life circumstances.

Community Services	Healthy Eating Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meal-based programs • Assisted shopping and cooking • Transportation services • Financial subsidy and assistance • Day programs and respite care • Home support agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy eating factsheets • Trusted websites (see links on page 4)

STEP 5: FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up with the patient and their informal caregiver(s) to determine if the Basic Nutrition Care Plan is effective.



Additional Nutrition Resources

WEBSITES & TOOLS

1. Canada's Food Guide: [food-guide.canada.ca](https://www.food-guide.canada.ca). Search for Seniors under Tips for Healthy Eating.
2. UnlockFood: www.unlockfood.ca. Search under Browse by Topic for Seniors.
3. Research Institute for Aging: www.the-ria.ca. Search under Resources and topic under Food and Nutrition.
4. [Guide to Nutrition Screening Tools for Community-Dwelling Older Adults](#): This guide is intended to help healthcare providers make informed decisions when selecting a tool to screen community-dwelling older adults for nutrition risk.

REGISTERED DIETITIANS

Registered dietitians working in the community can be found in family physician offices, primary care or nurse practitioner-led clinics, community health or public centres, homecare organizations, and many retail locations. To access a registered dietitian in the community, visit Dietitians of Canada: <https://members.dietitians.ca/DCMember/s/find-dietitian?>

LOCAL HEALTH UNITS

- Handouts on healthy eating, food budgeting, label reading, and other health related information
- Contacts for registered dietitians who can offer more support
- Information on nutrition workshops or seminars
- Information on “Good Food Box” and similar programs which offer locally grown produce at a low price

Funded by the Canadian Malnutrition Task Force,
a standing committee of the Canadian Nutrition Society.