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Community Dining
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Unintended Weight Loss

Unintended weight loss is defined as “gradual weight loss overtime, occurring slowly over time or having rapid onset.” In the aging population, usual body weight may be a better barometer for health than ideal body weight. Any weight loss or downward trending weight from your normal body weight should raise a red flag and be discussed with your primary physician or registered dietitian. Unintended weight loss is linked to increased mortality. Weight loss of 5% or more within 30 days is associated with a tenfold increase in the likelihood of death.

Declining appetite, even without an associated condition, is a common cause of unintended weight loss. Unintended weight loss can lead to undernutrition and the loss of lean muscle mass. Depleting muscle mass can leave those affected more likely to develop pressure injuries, infections, anemia, falls causing hip fractures and other conditions.

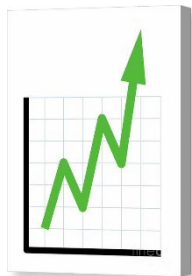


Nutrition intervention may be required to stop weight loss and maintain or regain lean muscle mass. A registered dietitian can ensure that daily energy and protein needs are being met to treat unintended weight loss. Malnourished older adults may experience accelerated loss of muscle mass: increased calorie and protein intake is essential in overcoming this ailment.

Adding More Calories

If you or a loved one has been recommended to increase their weight or increase their caloric intake by a doctor or registered dietitian, how do you do that? Especially if your appetite is not what it used to be, this can be difficult.

Plan to eat at least 3 meals and 3 snacks a day. Set up a schedule of times to eat or set a timer or alarm on your phone to remind you to eat. Plan to eat your biggest meal at a time of day when you are most hungry.



Make the meal or snack a pleasant experience; eat with others, set the table with colorful dishware and utensils, include a centerpiece or flowers, or add family pictures around the table.

Keep your favorite foods and snacks in the house or readily available at all times. Leave visual reminders to eat, such as a menu or leave your favorite snack on the counter.

Fortify at least one food item with calories at each meal and snack. Add a protein, carbohydrate or fat source to your foods, especially a lower calorie food (i.e. olive oil on vegetables, peanut butter on celery, dipping fruit in Greek yogurt).

Use fragrant herbs and spices when cooking to enhance flavor. The ability to taste food declines as we age; aromas of food play a significant factor in appetite and taste of food. Add garlic, onions, cilantro, parsley, dill, cumin, curry, thyme, oregano, basil, mint or your favorite spice to your foods!

Fortifying Foods with Calories

Adding extra calories to your daily intake may not be as simple eating more food. If you are lacking the motivation to eat because your appetite has declined, you can add calories to your usual meals and snacks with the following recommendations:



Adding fats- Fats are the most calorie dense macronutrient, so a little does go a long way. Add butter, cheese, or heart healthy fats like olive or avocado oil to vegetables or starches. Drizzle olive oil over pasta and vegetables or mix in 1-2tsp of olive oil to soups. Discuss with a healthcare provider if increasing your fat intake would be appropriate for you.

Adding carbs- Increasing portion sizes of your starchy sides like pasta, rice or potatoes is an easy way to add calories. You can also drizzle honey over your fruit, add agave syrup to your cereal, or drink a sports drink or juice with your meal. Discuss with a healthcare provider if increasing your carb intake would be appropriate for you.

Adding protein- Add beans to rice, or puree beans into a soup or sauce. Add nut butters to your toast or celery for a nice snack. Choose whole grain options like wheat toast, whole wheat pasta or brown rice (whole grains are higher in protein vs their white counterparts). Include a dairy choice at all meals, like milk or yogurt. Discuss with a healthcare provider if increasing your protein intake would be appropriate for you.

Discuss with your healthcare provider if adding a medical protein supplement to your daily routine would be beneficial. These are beverages or foods that are often both calorie and protein dense, delivering high quality nourishment to help maintain lean muscle mass and provide optimal nutrient intake.

Source: https://www.nutritioncaremanual.org/topic.cfm?ncm_category_id=31&lv1=255616&lv2=255643&lv3=272434&ncm_toc_id=272434&ncm_heading=Older%20Adult%20Nutrition
https://www.nutritioncaremanual.org/client_ed.cfm?ncm_client_ed_id=191