

defeat **malnutrition** today

May 18, 2022

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Coordinator
c/o USPSTF
5600 Fishers Lane
Mail Stop 06E53A
Rockville, MD 20857

RE: Interventions to Prevent Falls in Community-Dwelling Older Adults

Submitted electronically at uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org

Defeat Malnutrition Today (DMT)* appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft research plan the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is undertaking related to fall prevention in older adults. We comment specifically on the importance of identifying undernutrition and malnutrition as part of the risk assessment and reviewing nutrition-related interventions.

We commend the Task Force for investigating falls in community-dwelling older adults, as it is a common problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, especially in vulnerable populations who were increasingly socially isolated and have not had consistent primary care interactions.

Fall Risk Assessment Tools

Defeat Malnutrition Today strongly supports screening for falls and recommends the USPSTF consider reviewing screening tools for malnutrition and malnutrition. One in two older adults are at risk of or have malnutrition¹ and poor nutritional status in elderly individuals is associated with onset of frailty and sarcopenia, therefore assessing nutritional adequacy has the potential for preventing falls. A 2014 study found those identified at risk for malnutrition with the full and short-form Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNAs) screening tool were 1.3 and 1.9 times, respectively, more likely to fall in the next three years.²

Malnutrition Screening Tool

The Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST)³ is a moderately valid and reliable 2-item screener validated against the screening tools studied above and has been endorsed by many organizations, including the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

**Defeat Malnutrition Today is a coalition of over 100 members committed to defeating older adult malnutrition across the continuum of care. We are a diverse alliance of stakeholders and organizations working to achieve a greater focus on malnutrition screening, diagnosis, and intervention through regulatory and/or legislative change across the nation's health care system.*

¹Defeat Malnutrition Today and Avalere Health. (2020). National Blueprint: Achieving Quality Malnutrition Care for Older Adults 2020 Update.

https://www.defeatmalnutrition.today/sites/default/files/National_Blueprint_Infographic_MAY2020_Update_FINAL.pdf

²Tsai, A; Lai, M. (2014). Mini Nutritional Assessment and short-form Mini Nutritional Assessment can predict the future risk of falling in older adults – Results of a national cohort study. *Clinical Nutrition*.

[https://www.clinicalnutritionjournal.com/article/S0261-5614\(13\)00269-0/fulltext](https://www.clinicalnutritionjournal.com/article/S0261-5614(13)00269-0/fulltext)

³Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (2019). Position of the AND: Malnutrition (Undernutrition) Screening Tools for All Adult.

<https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/eatrightpro-files/practice/position-and-practice-papers/position-papers/positionmalnutritionundernutritionscreeningtoolsadults.pdf>

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Hunger Vital Sign

As food insecurity can lead to malnutrition, particularly in older adults, we recommend reviewing the Hunger Vital Sign. It is a 2-item screener which identifies household food insecurity in primary care⁴, is highly sensitive and specific among older adults, and has been endorsed by multiple organizations, including AARP. This is validated against the gold standard USDA Household Food Security Survey.

Referrals of those identified by food insecurity/other social determinants of health screenings can easily be referred in primary care to the appropriate professionals. This can improve older adults' access to needed care and follow-up services in a timely and efficient manner.

Fall interventions

Defeat Malnutrition Today strongly supports including nutrition interventions in the fall prevention review. Deficiencies in Vitamin D and B12 are associated with fall risk, and a 2020 study found very low protein intake (<0.4g/kg/day) and weight loss of 10 pounds since last visit to be associated with 1.65 elevated risk of falls. Additionally, poor nutrition is linked to frailty and frail older adults are more likely to have recurrent falls⁵. Therefore, we strongly encourage an intervention category focused on malnutrition and nutrients with identified links to fall risk (e.g., protein).

Nutrition screening and interventions can be targeted at older adults to overcome, treat, and prevent malnutrition to minimize fall risk. Since many older adults are at risk for malnutrition or are malnourished, we urge you to include malnutrition in your screening tool and intervention review. Further we agree the Task Force's research plan for preventive services for fall prevention in community-dwelling older adults is timely and important.

Sincerely,
Bob Blancato



National Coordinator
Defeat Malnutrition Today

⁴Gattu, R. K., Paik, G., Wang, Y., Ray, P., Lichenstein, R., & Black, M. M. (2019). The Hunger Vital Sign Identifies Household Food Insecurity among Children in Emergency Departments and Primary Care. *Children* (Basel, Switzerland), 6(10), 107. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children6100107>

⁵Paul MH, Ahrensburg MB et. al. (2020). Poor nutrition is linked to frailty and both poor nutrition and frailty are recognized risk factors for falls. *OBM Geriatrics*. 4(2).