

MARCH 2020

MALNUTRITION CONNECTION

Providing Malnutrition Awareness and Advocacy Information to Share

COVID-19 and Older Adult Malnutrition

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be an incredibly challenging time for everyone in the United States, but especially for older adults. The risk of getting severe symptoms that require hospitalization is higher for older adults, and this age group has an increased fatality rate from the virus. In addition, older adults naturally experience a gradual deterioration of their immune system with age and many have underlying chronic conditions, making it harder for them to fight off diseases and infection.

Older adult malnutrition further compounds these problems because poor nutrition is associated with decreased immune health. As we all continue to work together to support older adults during this pandemic, the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging has developed an online [Resources and Tools to Support COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response](#). The resources include suggestions for senior nutrition programs, information on disaster relief reimbursements, and guidance for older adults and their caregivers. Here are several direct ways to help ensure we are all working to combat risk for malnutrition too.



Promote good nutrition: Resources such as [Start Simple with MyPlate: Food Planning During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) offer tips on basic food planning and shopping. Including key nutrients as part of a well-balanced diet is also important and this fact sheet offers tips on how [good nutrition helps supports immune health](#).



Advocate sign-up for community older adult nutrition programs: With current healthcare guidance urging older adults to stay at home, it may be more difficult for seniors to access food. Community older adult nutrition programs are an invaluable resource and Meals on Wheels America offers a [look up by zip code](#) to help identify local programs. Recent federal legislation has successfully increased both the funding and flexibility for older adult nutrition programs. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) has created a [resource page](#) specifically for older adults and program providers and the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs has created an [FAQ](#) on senior nutrition programs and their current authority.



Support enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Traditionally, older adults have not readily signed up for SNAP--the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports [about 3 out of 5 seniors who qualify for SNAP are missing out on benefits](#). New federal legislation has increased SNAP funding and states are working to make it easier for Americans to get SNAP benefits, including not requiring face-to-face interviews, and temporarily raising SNAP benefits to the maximum amount. The National Council on Aging offers more information on accessing SNAP through [state hotlines](#) and also accessing other [food and nutrition resources](#).



Work to decrease social isolation: Social isolation is already a problem for millions of Americans, and it can lead to poor nutrition. With COVID-19, the problem of social isolation is compounded. Fear and anxiety about the pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions and added stress. The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness has posted [resources](#) on how to combat social isolation throughout the outbreak.



There are many additional resources and strategies being created daily to help older adults combat the increased risk of malnutrition and social isolation during this time. [DMT](#) will continue to update our website and share new resources on social media. Now, even more than ever, combating malnutrition for older Americans is of utmost importance.