



Understanding undernutrition in seniors

Seniors' health is everyone's business! Collaboration among community organizations can help to collectively prevent undernutrition and improve the well-being of seniors. Everyone, including volunteers, can have a positive impact.

Three sheets have been prepared to help community organizations identify nutritional concerns and know how to deal with them:

1

Sheet #1 discusses **the possible causes and consequences of undernutrition;**

2

Sheet #2 discusses **the warning signs that suggest possible undernutrition or risk of undernutrition and how to address them;**

3

Sheet #3 discusses **what can be done to help seniors with warning signs.**

*"Nothing replaces those moments when friends get together,
share their ideas, their dreams, their meals!" [non-official translation]*

Amin Maalouf (1949-)

Our food choices and preferences vary depending on where we live, our family, religious and local traditions, and customs.

Eating isn't just about satisfying our hunger. Eating a meal in pleasant company is also a **social and cultural activity** that can bring us joy and comfort while making us feel accepted and heard. A meal can be one of life's great pleasures.

REMEMBER



When seniors have the opportunity to share meals with others or with their families, they eat and drink more!

Having to eat alone most of the time puts seniors at risk of not eating enough, which in the long run affects their health.

Sadness, depression, social isolation and loneliness negatively affect the desire to eat and are not a normal part of aging.



WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity is the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.

(Health Canada, 2020, para. 1)¹

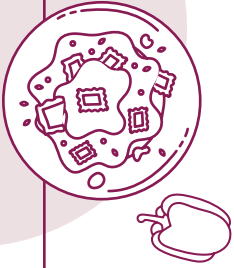


¹ Health Canada (February 18, 2020) Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html>

DO YOU KNOW THAT?

It is not normal for seniors...

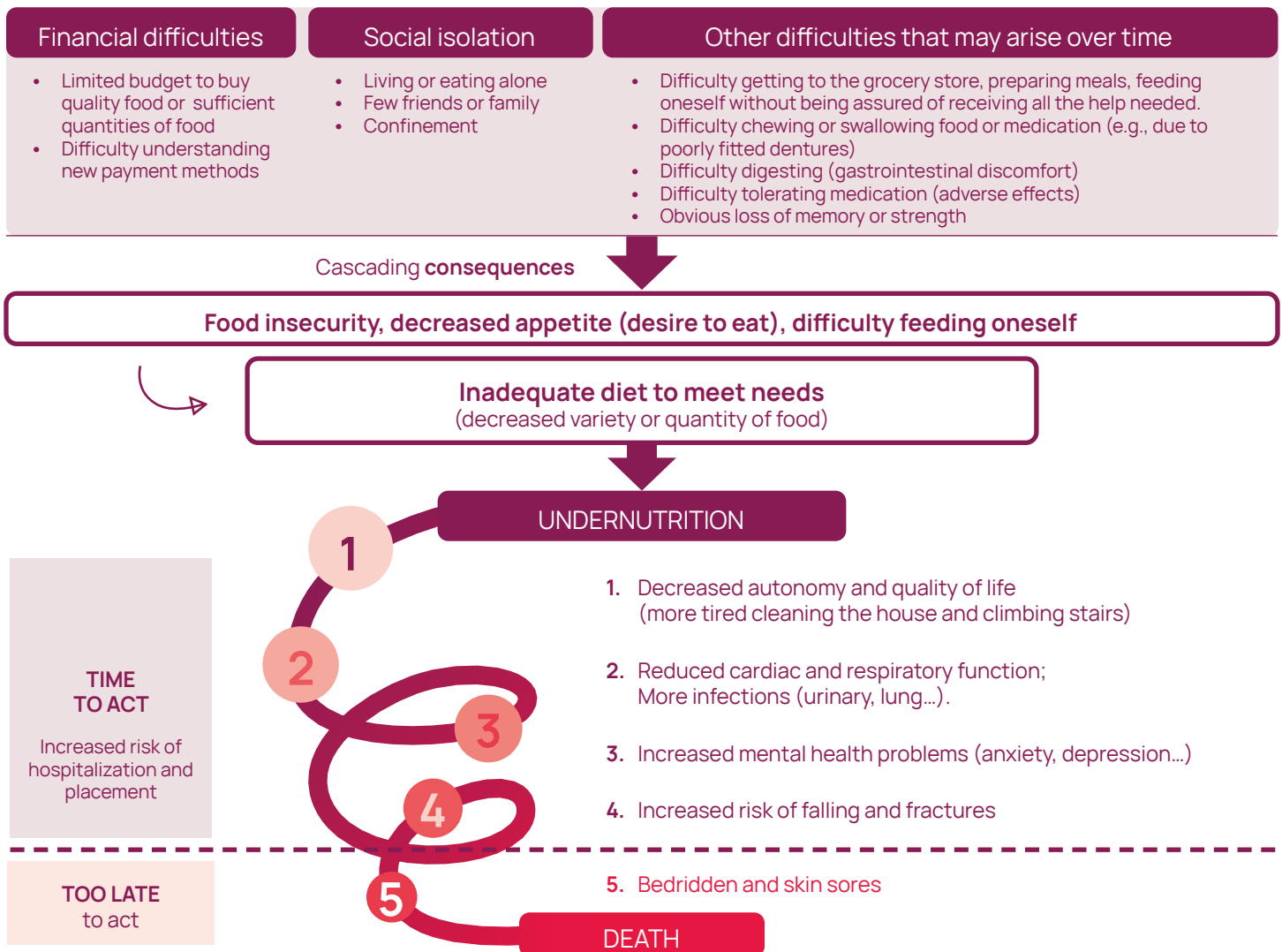
1. **to lose weight as they age.** Any weight loss is undesirable, even for those who appear to be overweight;
2. **to eat less under the pretext that they are less active.** On the contrary, it is important to eat as much, if not MORE, to maintain their strength and physical abilities.
3. **to avoid several food groups or limit their consumption to easy-to-prepare foods** (e.g., toast, breakfast cereals, cookies). This may lead to undesirable weight and muscle loss;
4. **to drink less.** Avoiding drinking (e.g., to avoid bladder leakage) can increase the risk of urinary tract infections and dehydration, which in turn can lead to more serious health problems;
5. **to avoid being active** under the pretext that they are too old or are in pain.



ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF UNDERNUTRITION?

This illustration shows **three very distinct life situations that affect our health**, especially in frailer seniors. Fortunately, when these individuals are identified in time, this spiral can be slowed down or even reversed to avoid hospitalization or placement.

The more worrying situations there are, the greater the risk of undernutrition.



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