



# Subjective indicators of malnutrition risk

A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL FACT SHEET

Knowing a patient's weight, weight history and height can be helpful in using a validated tool to screen for malnutrition.

The Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool ('MUST')<sup>1</sup> is an online self-screening tool which can be used by healthcare professionals as well as patients and family members: [www.malnutritionselfscreening.org](http://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org)

There are also a number of subjective indicators of unintentional weight loss that are indicative of malnutrition risk that the multi-disciplinary team can be on the lookout for:

- thin or very thin appearance
- loose fitting clothing or jewellery
- history of recent unplanned weight loss reported by patient, family or noticed by a member of the multi-disciplinary team
- smaller appetite
- feeding or swallowing difficulties
- dry mouth
- low mood
- dry skin and skin becoming looser and breaking more easily
- changes in nail structure (bumps and lines)
- changes in bowel habit
- sleeping or resting a lot of the day
- reduced functional ability

**NOTE:** Whilst body mass index (BMI) is an indicator of malnutrition, excess body weight does not guarantee protection from disease-related malnutrition. As two thirds of the population is now overweight or obese it is important that unexplained weight loss and impaired intake are recognised as a malnutrition marker.

*Identifying the reasons why food intake has decreased help identify the causes of malnutrition but can help identify the most appropriate nutritional care to prevent further deterioration in nutritional status and reverse the malnutrition. It also helps determine whether food-based strategies alone are likely to be successful or whether ONS or specialist advice from a dietitian might be needed.*