



# Initiating conversations about weight loss and diet

## A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL FACT SHEET

There are several questions that can be used in discussion with patients to understand whether they have concerns about their weight and how well they are eating and drinking. These might include:

### **What is a usual weight for you?**

Individuals will often know what their weight normally is

### **Have you lost weight recently without trying to?**

Unintentional weight loss is a red flag for malnutrition and should be explored further.

### **Do you feel like your weight has changed in the last few weeks or months?**

If yes explore why that might be (see the list below for more information)

### **How are your clothes and jewellery fitting? Do they feel like they fit differently to usual?**

If patients are unsure about weight loss, loose fitting clothes and jewellery are a good indicator.

There are 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 including:

- 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 multidisciplinary 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

### **What is your appetite like and are you missing any meals?**

Encourage eating little and often and express the importance of eating to maintaining health and quality of life

### **Who prepares the meals?**

Is the patient capable of doing this themselves or would some assistance help? Consider a social club, shared meals or meals on wheels?

### **Are you eating foods you enjoy?**

Are there foods that they have avoided eating because they see them as unhealthy but would help with inducing appetite whilst they are struggling?

### **Who do you eat with?**

Food is more than nutrients; it is associated with pleasure, it can break up the day, provide structure and companionship. Is there anyone that can sit with them whilst they eat?

### **How much fluid are you drinking daily?**

This includes water, milk, squash, juice, tea and coffee, all count. We should be drinking around 1-2 litres of fluid per day, so urine is a light straw colour. Fluid intake is important as it lubricates the joints and eyes, aids digestion, flushes out waste and toxins, and keeps the skin healthy. When the normal water content in the body is reduced, it upsets the balance of minerals in your body, which affects the way it functions. Some of the early warning signs of dehydration include:

- feeling thirsty and lightheaded
- a dry mouth
- tiredness
- having dark coloured, strong-smelling urine
- passing urine less often than usual