

Exploring the views and dietary practices of older people at risk of malnutrition and their carers: the Nutrition in Later Life Study

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Background: Malnutrition is an important cause of morbidity and mortality in later life, however it is under-recognised in general practice. There is little evidence on the views of older people and their carers regarding the management of malnutrition in the community.

Aims: To explore the views and dietary practices of older people at risk of malnutrition and their carers, to identify gaps in knowledge, barriers/facilitators to eating, and to explore potential interventions to support nutrition in the community.

Methods: Up to 40 semi-structured interviews with community-dwelling people aged ≥ 75 years from general practices, identified as malnourished/at risk of malnutrition, and their carers. Thematic analysis is being used to identify key emergent themes and their meaning, with input from the research team including lay members.

Findings: Early interview findings (n=27) suggest that 'healthy eating' beliefs established in earlier life are maintained in later life. Some participants were aware of recent weight loss, reduced appetite or eating smaller portions, although they did not always understand why. Some reported reduced appetite and low energy which they considered part of normal ageing, whereas others attributed weight loss to acute illness, incomplete recovery following discharge from hospital, mental health issues and other conditions. Although only a few of them had discussed weight loss with their GP, many liked the idea of a nutritional intervention delivered in primary care. Some felt that the doctor was best placed to provide that support, whereas others would welcome advice from a nurse, dietitian or other trained professional.