



# Patient education: Malnutrition – Discharge instructions

## (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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### What are discharge instructions?

Discharge instructions are information about how to take care of yourself after getting medical care for a health problem.

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### What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition is the medical term for when your body is not getting the right nutrients to meet its needs. Doctors might also use the term "malnourished" to describe a person with malnutrition.

This article will use the word "malnutrition" to mean "undernutrition." This is when the body is not getting enough nutrients. It can be caused by many things, including lack of access to foods and certain illnesses.

Severe malnutrition might be treated in the hospital with "nutrition support." This is when you get nutrients through a feeding tube or an IV. You might need to continue nutrition support after you go home.

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### How can I take care of myself at home?

Ask the doctor or nurse what you should do when you go home. Make sure you understand exactly what you need to do to care for yourself. Ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

You should also:

- Take oral nutrition supplements as instructed – These are designed to boost your intake of calories and protein.
  - Take vitamin and mineral supplements if needed – Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to do this, and what to take.
  - Take any medicines as prescribed.
  - Follow all of your doctor's, dietitian's, or nurse's instructions about food and weight – They might tell you to:
    - Eat at certain times.
    - Prepare foods a certain way.
    - Track what you eat.
    - Check your weight.
  - Ask your doctor or nurse about physical activity – They can talk to you about what kinds of activity to do. They might also have you work with a physical therapist (exercise expert).
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## **What follow-up care do I need?**

Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to make a follow-up appointment. If so, make sure that you know when and where to go.

As you recover, you will probably work with a dietitian. A dietitian is an expert on food and nutrition. They will help make sure that you are getting the right nutrients for your body.

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## **When should I call the doctor?**

Call for advice if:

- Your symptoms come back or get worse – These could include feeling very tired or weak, or losing your appetite.
- You have tingling or numbness and pain in the hand or feet, or bone pain – These can be signs of a vitamin deficiency or anemia (a problem with red blood cells).
- You lose more weight.

- You have trouble getting or taking supplements.
- You are not able to find or afford the foods you need.

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## More on this topic

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Patient education: Diet and health (The Basics)

Patient education: Vitamin supplements (The Basics)

Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health (The Basics)

Patient education: Diet and health (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health (Beyond the Basics)

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