

How do community-living older adults view malnutrition?

Dana L. Craven¹ Geoff P. Lovell² Fiona E. Pelly¹ and Elisabeth Isenring³

¹School of Health and Sport Sciences, USC Australia, ²School of Social Sciences, USC Australia, ³Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine, Bond Institute of Health and Sport, Bond University



Introduction

- Malnutrition is present in community-living older adults (aged ≥ 65)¹
- There are many signs including weight loss and reduced food intake²
- Treatable causes may be overlooked³
- Little is known from the perspective of older adults

Methods

- Survey - paper based or online option
- Open and closed questions about signs of malnutrition, sources of information and weight perception
- BMI compared to weight perception and reference range
- Content analysis of textual data

Results

344 participants → 90% chose to complete online → mean age 73 → 57% female

Weight Perceptions

The BMI reference range for older adults is higher than younger adults⁴

Less than half perceived their body weight as just right

Most underweight men and women thought their weight was just right or more than it should be

Over a third reported trying to change their weight

Signs of Malnutrition

- Four key categories emerged for signs of malnutrition (Figure 1)
- Subjective signs (e.g. feeling tired) identified more than objective signs (e.g. weight loss)



Figure 1: Signs of malnutrition

Did go

- dietitian
- internet
- general practitioner

Would go

- general practitioner
- dietitian
- internet

Sources of Malnutrition Information

Top three sources for information (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Information sources

Conclusions

- This paper has presented useful data about malnutrition from the perspective of the community-living older adult
- There may be uncertainty about the best weight for older age.
- Awareness needs to be raised regarding the impact of weight changes on health outcomes in this population.
- There may be discrepancies between perception and practice when it comes to locating malnutrition information.



- The internet appeared to be a key provider of nutrition information.
- Healthcare professionals need to consider how the internet can be used as a tool for raising awareness about nutrition risk and malnutrition.

Key References

- Agarwal E, Miller M, Yaxley A, Isenring E. Malnutrition in the elderly: a narrative review. *Maturitas*. 2013;76(4)
- Kondrup J, Allison S, Elia M, Vellas B, Plauth M. ESPEN guidelines for nutrition screening 2002. *Clin Nutr*. 2003;22(4)

3. Morley JE. Undernutrition in older adults. *Family Practice*. 2012;29.

4. Winter JE, MacInnis RJ, Wattanapenpaiboon N, Nowson CA. BMI and all-cause mortality in older adults: a meta-analysis. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2014;99

Further information

Corresponding author: Dana.Craven@research.usc.edu.au
University of the Sunshine Coast | CRICOS Provider Number: 01595D