Guidance on the prescribing of oral nutritional supplements in care homes

The use of food based interventions is encouraged as best practice to support care home residents at risk of malnutrition rather than the use of prescribed oral nutritional supplements (ONS). Food based interventions can provide similar nutrition to ONS and should be provided by the care home for their residents.

# Recommendations

* Care homes are encouraged to follow the malnutrition care pathway for care home residents.
* The malnutrition care pathway for care home residents advises using a food first approach to manage risk of malnutrition alongside homemade fortified drinks.
* Care homes are encouraged to use the managing malnutrition in care homes resource pack to support them in following the care pathway.
* Care homes are strongly encouraged to use homemade fortified drinks instead of prescribed ONS.
* There may occasionally be some circumstances when ONS are appropriate, for example if a resident requires thickened ONS due to dysphagia alongside malnutrition or an assessment has been made by the dietitian with justification as to why a prescribed ONS is needed.

# Care home responsibilities

All care homes should assess risk of malnutrition on admission and monthly thereafter as recommended in the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence quality standard 24](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs24/resources/nutrition-support-in-adults-pdf-2098545777349).

Care homes are responsible for meeting the nutritional needs of their residents and for providing nutrition support when needed, which will include a food based approach as outlined in the [Health and Social Care Act 2008 regulation 14](https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/regulations/regulation-14-meeting-nutritional-hydration-needs):

* A variety of nutritious, appetising food should be available to meet people's needs.
* Snacks or other food should be available between meals for those who prefer to eat little and often.
* Where a person is assessed as needing a specific diet, this must be provided in line with that assessment.

# Actions for primary care

* For care home residents highlighted as being at risk of malnutrition using a validated malnutrition screening tool such as the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool ( MUST), encourage the home to follow the [malnutrition care pathway for care home residents.](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/686_Malnutrition%20Care%20Pathway%20for%20Care%20Homes%202023%20%284%29.pdf) This includes:
	+ identifying underlying causes of malnutrition
	+ setting an appropriate nutritional aim
	+ recording and assessing food and fluid intake for 4 to 7 days
	+ observing at least 2 meal times to identify any factors affecting intake
	+ implementing the 1,2,3 approach which may also include using [homemade fortified drinks](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/673_2022%20Homemade%20fortified%20drinks%20and%20desserts.pdf)
	+ considering whether an over the counter multivitamin and mineral supplement is needed
	+ re-assessing risk of malnutrition monthly
* If following the [malnutrition pathway](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/686_Malnutrition%20Care%20Pathway%20for%20Care%20Homes%202023%20%284%29.pdf) as above does not result in achieving their nutritional aim please consider a dietetic referral. Please see [pathway](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/686_Malnutrition%20Care%20Pathway%20for%20Care%20Homes%202023%20%284%29.pdf) for further guidance.

# Care home residents discharged from hospital on ONS

For care home residents being discharged from hospital with a new prescription of ONS, unless you receive a letter from a dietitian asking for this prescription to be continued, please do not continue the prescription. Instead, please ask the care home to assess risk of malnutrition and to follow the malnutrition care pathway for care home residents as described above.

# How to refer care homes for malnutrition training

The care home support dietitians provide comprehensive training for care home staff on how to identify and manage residents at risk of malnutrition. This includes provision of the [managing malnutrition in care homes resource pack](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/736_Care%20Home%20Resource%20Pack%202022%20with%20ICB%20logos.pdf) which includes the [malnutrition care pathway for care home residents](https://www.eclipsesolutions.org/UploadedFiles/686_Malnutrition%20Care%20Pathway%20for%20Care%20Homes%202023%20%284%29.pdf).

Please email the care home support dietitians to request training.

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