Introduction

Malnutrition is a significant public health issue that disproportionally affects older people in Scotland. At least 10% of older people are thought to be at risk of malnutrition in Scotland and at Eat Well Age Well we believe this figure to be higher. Through our own work with partners across Scotland we have been able to screen over 4000 older people and have found that 16% of older people screened have been at risk of malnutrition.

Prevention, early identification, and treatment are key to reducing the prevalence of malnutrition in Scotland. Organisations that work directly with older people such as home care, housing, social services, and third sector organisations are well placed to carry out screening for malnutrition risk and provide first line advice and support.

At Eat Well Age Well, we have worked with a range of organisations to implement training around malnutrition and regular screening processes to allow organisations to regularly screen for malnutrition risk and support older people who may be at risk. These small changes to existing practices have allowed organisations to more effectively support the older people that they work with and have empowered staff to raise concerns around older people’s nutrition earlier to help improve outcomes.

This guide has been developed to be used alongside Eat Well Age Well’s Raising the Issue of Malnutrition E-Learning training. This guide offers practical advice and case studies with the aim of supporting organisations working with older people to implement the training as well as regular malnutrition screening and interventions into their existing processes.
Training

Eat Well Age offers two types of e-learning alongside our online training sessions. Our online training sessions are delivered by our dietitian and are available to staff and volunteers who work with older people living in their own homes in Scotland. More information about our online training can be found on our [website](#). Our e-learning modules have been developed to allow more people to access malnutrition training and can be used by anyone.

Our first e-learning module is targeted specifically towards care at home workers. The Care at Home training module has been designed to give information about malnutrition and tips on how carers can support clients who are at risk of malnutrition. The training is comprised of 8 videos developed in partnership with NHS Tayside, Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership, and the Care Inspectorate. The training can be completed individually or in a group setting and the training can be paused and revisited in sections to make it easier to fit around work commitments. There is also a workbook that can be used alongside the training.

Our second e-learning module is designed for all other staff, volunteers, or members of the public who work with or care for older people. The Raising the Issue of Malnutrition e-learning module is based on our successful Raising the Issue of Malnutrition training and offers a broader range of information for those working with or caring for older people to increase their knowledge and understanding of malnutrition and increase their confidence in supporting someone who could be at risk. The training also uses training videos along with some self-directed learning activities to offer practical tip that users can implement into their day to day practice. Like the Care at Home e-learning module this module can be completed in groups or individually and progress is able to be saved to allow the training to be completed in sessions.

Both training modules provide information on malnutrition and can teach staff how to use the Patients Association Nutrition Checklist to identify those who may be at risk of malnutrition. Including malnutrition training in your mandatory training for staff and volunteers is a common way to ensure their knowledge base remains up to date and allows staff and volunteers to quickly identify those at risk of malnutrition and offer support as needed. See the case studies section in this document for examples of how other organisations have implemented malnutrition training.

[Click here to access our E-learning modules.](#)
Screening

Early identification of older people who are at risk of malnutrition can make a significant difference to the older person’s quality of life and is key to the prevention of malnutrition. Regular screening for malnutrition risk allows older people at risk of malnutrition to receive support and advice early on and can prevent them from experiencing negative outcomes such as muscle loss, increased frailty, falls, and reduced independence.

Many organisations who work directly with older people are well placed to implement regular malnutrition screening and provide first line support. In many NHS or clinical settings there is already a malnutrition pathway in place but often times these services are not accessed by older people until they are already suffering from negative outcomes.

Eat Well Age Well promotes the use of the Patients Association Nutrition Checklist (the checklist) as an easy to use tool that can be used by staff, volunteers and the public to identify if an older person is at risk of malnutrition. Our training modules include information on how to use this tool and what first line advice can be given to those at risk.

The checklist contains multiple sections, but it is section A (pictured) that is most important when screening for malnutrition risk as these are the questions that identify older people who are at risk of malnutrition. Section A of the checklist has been validated against the widely used malnutrition screening tool MUST. A video of the checklist being used with an older person can be found here.

There are many ways to implement regular screening for malnutrition risk using the checklist without creating a large additional workload for staff or volunteers.

When implementing the checklist for regular malnutrition screening you need to include the 4 initial questions in section A. You can include the remaining questions in section B, C & D of the checklist but many organisations find some of these questions are already covered in other assessments they carry out.

Consider your existing processes and pathways to see if there is any capacity to add these 4 questions. Many organisations include the 4 questions in their intake paperwork and in their regular review paperwork. Including the questions in regular review paperwork allows for easy repeat screening and can give you a better picture of how malnutrition prevalence in your organisation changes over time.

Once you have decided where the checklist questions best fit in your organisation, you should consider what next steps you will take if someone is found to be at risk of malnutrition. Our
training modules can equip staff with the knowledge to provide basic first line advice which is usually sufficient to support an older person at risk of malnutrition however, there may be times when more specialist support is required. You should consider how staff and volunteers would access that support (e.g. referring to a local dietitian or seeking support from an older person’s GP or social worker). When thinking about how you will implement the checklist in your organisation you may find it helpful to discuss your plans with local dietitians as they may be able to advise you on existing pathways for support in your local area.

Examples of how screening has been implemented in other organisations can be found later in this document and Eat Well Age Well can offer further support and advice around implementation if needed. Get in touch at eatwellagewell@thefoodtrain.co.uk with any questions.

Data Collection

Once you have implemented regular malnutrition screening into your organisation you will be able to gather data on the prevalence of malnutrition within your organisation. This can be helpful as it will allow you to see any changes in the number of people at risk of malnutrition in your organisation and can help provide evidence of the benefits of your service has to the older people you work with.

Eat Well Age Well collects malnutrition screening data to help contribute to the national picture of malnutrition prevalence in Scotland. We would be grateful for any data that you can submit to us. We accept data in several ways and will always work with you to find a method that suits your organisation. Our online data collection form is available here or you can contact us directly at eatwellagewell@thefoodtrain.co.uk

Resources

Eat Well Age Well has a number of resources that can help support your organisation implement malnutrition screening and training. We offer a number of written resources as well as our Eat Well Age Well advice line that is available to support anyone over the age of 65 and anyone who works with or cares for someone over the age of 65 with practical advice about any issues they may be having with their diet.

Visit the resources section of our website for more information.

Case Studies

We have worked with many organisations to help them implement regular malnutrition screening and training. In this section we have provided two examples of successful implementation of malnutrition screening and training; Renfrewshire Sheltered Housing and The Food Train.
Renfrewshire Sheltered Housing

Since early 2022 Renfrewshire Sheltered Housing have successfully implemented regular malnutrition screening.

Initially staff were trained in online training sessions with Eat Well Age Well’s dietitian and were then provided with recordings of the training to allow other staff to access the training as needed.

Following the training, the initial 4 questions in section A of the checklist were included in to the six month care plan review that the housing officers carry with every tenant. This allowed staff to screen tenants for malnutrition every six months and provide support when necessary.

Since the introduction of screening over 300 older people have been screened and data collected shows a reduction in malnutrition prevalence amongst tenants. This reduction in prevalence is likely due to the increased awareness of malnutrition and the regular screening that has been implemented.

Food Train

Food Train have also successfully implemented regular malnutrition training and screening into the organisation.

As Eat Well Age Well’s parent organisation, Food Train staff were the first to adopt our general e-learning module. The e-learning module has been incorporated into the induction process for new staff and volunteers. All existing staff that had not previously attended malnutrition training were also required to complete the e-learning module.

Food Train has included the initial 4 questions in section A of the checklist in their referral form. This ensures that all new Food Train members are screened for malnutrition risk. Staff can also screen any existing members if a concern is raised by a volunteer or member themselves, and members are given the option to answer the 4 questions once per year during the annual member survey. This allows for issues that were not present at referral to be identified. A malnutrition pathway was created to support staff to implement screening and included information on when to screen and how to support members that may be at risk of malnutrition.

Members who are found to be at risk of malnutrition are provided with advice and support and can be referred on to Food Train’s Dietitian for further support if necessary.

To date 1294 older people have been screened by Food Train staff and with 16% found to be at risk of malnutrition. Preliminary data collected also suggests that the longer members have been using Food Train services the less likely they are to be at risk of malnutrition. This is likely due to the services providing improved access to food as well as the increased awareness of malnutrition as an issue that Food Train member may face.