

MANAGEMENT OF WEIGHT LOSS IN THE ELDERLY

Regular monitoring of weight in the elderly is important to ensure that they do not lose weight due to any health reason.

An uncontrolled weight loss is the first sign of a medical, physical or a cognitive change in the body and requires immediate attention.

WHY DO THE ELDERLY LOSE WEIGHT?

Unexplained weight loss can have many medical and non-medical reasons. In few cases, it is a combination of multiple factors. A few potential causes include:

- Mental illness.
- Change in diet or appetite.
- Change in the sense of smell or taste.
- Difficulty in eating due to physical problems.
- Chronic medical problems including diabetes, hyperthyroidism, peptic ulcers, heart problems, lung disease, cancer and others.

WARNING SIGNS FOR POSSIBLE WEIGHT LOSS?

- Crying phases or depression.
- Eating less than half of the meal.
- Coughing or choking while eating.
- Needing help with eating or drinking.
- Loose fitting dentures or mouth sores.
- Having a hard time chewing and swallowing.

TIPS FOR OVERCOMING WEIGHT LOSS

Treatment for weight loss is individualized and has to be adapted accordingly as per the individual's needs and requirements.

A few remedial measures include the following:

- Small frequent meals are given at regular intervals.
- Supervised physical activity as per the tolerance level of the individual.
- Serving food in a different environment to match the preference of the adult.
- Serving high energy and protein rich foods and drinks.
- Changing the texture of food to make it easy to swallow and chew.
- Medication as per the advice of physician or dietician.
- Sufficient intake of water to prevent constipation.

WHAT IF WEIGHT LOSS PERSISTS DESPITE INTERVENTIONS?

If an elderly person keeps on losing weight despite repeated attempts at improving the situation, then nutritional support may be required through tube feeding. This decision is very personal and should be made collaboratively involving the physician, patient and the family.



References:

- www.mayoclinic.org,
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC552892/>
American Medical Directors Association. Altered Nutrition Status in the Long-Term Care Setting Clinical Practice Guideline. Columbia, MD: Association; 2010.

Note: The information contained within this document is for reference only and should not be used as a substitute for consulting with a Registered Dietitian.