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## It's time to tackle malnutrition

Identifying and treating malnutrition is the focus of the [latest virtual issue](#) by the Journal of Dietitians Australia, *Nutrition & Dietetics*.

Released this week, the issue of freely available papers includes 14 recently published research articles that raise awareness about the need to proactively screen, diagnose and treat malnutrition, particularly as our population ages.

In 2017, one in seven Australians (15%) were aged 65 years or older. By 2057, around 22% of our population will fall within this age bracket<sup>1</sup>. This will place almost a quarter of our population at risk of poor nutrition, as the natural impacts of aging, along with existing medical conditions and medication side effects, places older adults at greater risk for nutritional deficiency.

“This collation of research shows how important it is to be proactive towards warding off malnutrition (or undernutrition). We already know about the impact of malnutrition, including the hefty health, social and economic costs. This is a real and debilitating issue, so we must turn our attention to taking action to identifying, treating, and preventing it,” said Professor Judi Porter, Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) and Editor in Chief of *Nutrition & Dietetics*.

Malnutrition typically occurs where food is insufficient to meet nutrition needs, due to not eating enough and/or increased nutrition requirements from illness. It affects overall quality of life, resulting in a lowered ability to fight infection, and reduced independence.

“In the clinical setting, there are validated tools to identify malnutrition. Hospitals, out-patient settings and aged care homes need to ensure there is a regular screening process in place, so that malnutrition doesn't go undetected. This allows those at risk and malnourished patients to receive timely and adequate nutrition care from an APD. In the long run, it will reduce health care costs and improve quality of life.”

Malnutrition also extends beyond those in acute or long-term care. For older Australians, malnutrition often begins at home, and can go undetected until it is too late.

“Reduced appetite, unplanned weight loss, looser fitting clothes and ill-fitting dentures may all be signs of the onset of malnutrition. This is the chance for family, friends, and care workers to check in with their loved one or client and seek support from an APD if they notice these changes or need nutrition advice.”

Whilst there are many reasons which contribute to malnutrition, understanding how our nutrition needs change as we age is vital to prevent this decline.

“How we eat when we are 25 compared to 65 varies greatly as our health needs change. Too often dietitians see older Australians at risk of malnutrition because they are still eating in a similar pattern for their younger selves. APDs work with older adults to help them adapt their diet to meet their nutritional needs.”

“We don't need to accept that older adults become frail. Preventing malnutrition starts in the home, and APDs are able to support older Australians and health care teams, across the spectrum of care, to help lower the likelihood of malnutrition,” said Professor Porter.

**For media enquiries and interviews, contact Pattie King, Dietitians Australia 0409 661 920.**

<sup>1</sup>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018). Older Australia at a glance. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/demographics-of-older-australians>