

Malnutrition and the benefits of oral nutritional supplementation

MALNUTRITION HAS multiple effects on both physical and mental health and can significantly affect quality of life. However, if malnutrition is treated many of these effects can be stopped and even reversed.

The problems of malnutrition in the UK

Disease related malnutrition remains common despite slowly increasing awareness through nutritional screening strategies such as MUST (Malnutrition Screening Tool), it remains under identified and undertreated.

With more than three million people in the UK thought to be undernourished (1.3 million of these over 65 years of age), and public health expenditure estimated in excess of £13 billion per annum it is a major clinical and public health issue.

It is widespread particularly in patients admitted to hospital, residents in care homes, and people receiving community care.

What are the consequences of malnutrition?

- Impaired immune function
- Reduced muscle strength and fatigue
- Reduced respiratory function
- Weight loss
- Impaired wound healing
- Depression
- Altered sleep function
- Increased length of stay in hospital

Treating malnutrition and ONS

There is considerable evidence to support the use of oral nutritional supplements (ONS) to treat malnutrition. The food first approach is usually adopted and if this is not adequate to improve on an individual's nutritional intake then oral nutritional supplements can be recommended.

ONS typically contain a mix of macronutrients (protein, carbohydrate and fat) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals and trace elements). Often they are taken between meals and address the nutritional gap created by an ongoing inadequate intake.

Benefits of ONS

The results from the large evidence base of trials that have assessed basic ONS suggest that nutritional intake and some functional outcomes can be improved in some patient groups in the community.

Oral Nutritional Supplement - Foodlink Complete

Foodlink Complete is a Food for Special Medical Purposes and for use under medical supervision. It is available on FP10 prescription from GP's and can be bought direct from the supplier as well as pharmacies. It is stocked by Alliance Healthcare Distribution so available through pharmacy wholesalers.

It is an oral nutritional supplement based on milk powders. It can be made up with full fat milk or added to foods as a nutritional fortifier. It is not designed to be a sole source of nutrition.

It is available in 5 delicious flavours: Chocolate, Strawberry, Banana, Natural and Vanilla with added fibre. It comes in 450g packs and there are approximately 7-8 servings per pack.

It is free from animal fat, artificial colours, flavourings or preservatives. Foodlink Complete provides a balanced blend of 26 vitamins and minerals plus protein, carbohydrate and fat.

When 57g of Foodlink complete is made up with 200mls of full cream milk it provides 388 kcals and 18.9g protein (based on vanilla flavour). Four servings of Foodlink Complete would provide 1552 kcal per day which would make a significant contribution to the Estimated Average Requirement for Energy (COMA 1991) for any recipient.

A serving of Foodlink Complete provides 18.9 g protein and thus 4 servings will provide 75.6g protein which is in excess of the RNI of protein of 46.5g for an adult woman over 50 years (COMA 1991).

The added fibre in Foodlink Complete Vanilla with added fibre provides 4.5g fibre per serving.

Four servings of Foodlink Complete will provide 18 g fibre, which will be in line with the average of 18 g fibre per day (COMA 1991).

Palatability Studies

A recent observational study clearly showed that Foodlink complete is an acceptable and well tolerated nutritional supplement. It was well accepted by nursing home residents that participated in the study. Strawberry and vanilla flavours were the most preferred flavour.

Overall compliance with Foodlink complete supplementation was 86% which compares favourably with other nutritional supplements on the market.

Summary

This article has attempted to highlight the issues of malnutrition and the benefits of oral nutritional supplementation especially in the vulnerable elderly population.

Foodlink Complete is a valuable addition to the range of nutritional products currently on the market. It also is very competitively priced being lower in cost than comparable brands.

Further information on Foodlink Complete can be found at www.foodlinkltd.co.uk
Tel 01752 344544

This article was written by Debra Williams, Registered Freelance Dietitian, Eat Well Now, www.eatwellnow.co.uk (email debra@eatwellnow.co.uk)

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FOOD-LINK can help whenever solid food is not acceptable or is insufficient to provide all the vital nourishment for good health. It can be used for the elderly, those who are ill or convalescing to aid recovery; in hospital as a basis for tube feeding.

FOOD-LINK can also be used as a nutritional supplement for those who have special dietary needs including the provision of extra protein and energy or for athletes and growing children.

FOOD-LINK can replace a meal or, as a liquid snack can supplement your calorie intake to give extra and vital nutrition.

Natural **FOOD-LINK** can be flavoured with coffee, chocolate or fruit and savoury flavours: Available in Natural, Strawberry, Banana and Chocolate flavours.

FOOD-LINK is recommended for treatment of disease related malnutrition



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