



ON CALL

Lay Community Health Advisors

Underweight and its influence on wellbeing

Introduction

This short handbook will provide you with some additional information about the medical risks of being underweight.

This handbook will be useful in promoting positive mental health with members of your local health network. Thanks to this textbook you will learn that being underweight may be as bad, or even worse for you than being overweight.

Even if when it comes to health and nutrition we tend to focus more on disadvantages of being overweight than underweight, it has to be stressed that being underweight or having poor nutrition is also associated with certain health risks.

This resource aims to provide you with knowledge on the topic of BMI, risks of being underweight and dealing with malnutrition.

Check your BMI

If you are worried that you might be underweight, the easiest way to check it, is to check your Body Mass Index (BMI).

Body Mass Index measures body fat and is commonly used to determine whether one's weight is healthy. BMI calculates body weight of adult person as relation of one's weight to height.

The BMI formula is a simple equation devised in the 1830s by Belgian mathematician Adolphe Quetelet and is universally expressed in metric system (kg/m²).

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight (kg)} / [\text{height (m)}]^2$$

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) a healthy adult BMI should be between 18.5 and 25, so if your result is 18.5 or less it means that you are underweight.

Of course we have to bear in mind that the formula isn't perfect and it may excess the amount of body fat in case of masculine people, or underestimate fat level in case of older people with less muscle weight. Still, this tool is quite accurate and very helpful when it comes to quickly checking if your body mass is healthy.

Desire to be underweight

Underweight people can be divided into two general groups: those who have problems (often medical), that prevent them from gaining weight, and those who put a lot of effort in losing weight to the point of being underweight.

The first group are usually people with medical issues, physical and mental illnesses. To this group we will include also drug addicts, people who lack food due to poverty and people whose

underweight is caused by their genes and really fast metabolism. As we can see being underweight may concern a wide range of people from different social groups, and the one thing that connects them all is being underweight without wishing to be this way.

Second group consists mostly of young girls and women, who find being underweight attractive. In extreme cases this may lead to eating disorders like anorexia, bulimia etc.

In both cases being underweight is in no way good for our health, as in most cases it determines malnutrition and may lead to more health problems.

Risks of being underweight

Health risks associated with being underweight include:

- malnutrition,
- vitamin deficiencies,
- mineral deficiencies,
- skin problems, weak hair and nails,
- anemia,
- osteoporosis,
- decreased immunity,
- feeling tired all the time,
- fertility,
- irregular menstrual cycles,
- growth and development issues in case of kids and teens,
- increased risk for complications from surgery,

Being underweight often means that we don't provide our body with nourishments it needs to work properly. If our body lacks certain vitamins and minerals it simply hasn't material to build strong hair or nails, fight diseases or give us energy. If we want our body to work as it should, we need to take care of it and give it the best fuel we can get – healthy, valuable food in the right amount.

Treatment

Having as bad an influence on our health as it was previously mentioned, being underweight definitely needs to be treated. Even if eating junk food or different types of empty calories seems like an easy and pleasant way to gain a few kilograms it won't do us any good.

Gaining a few more kilograms in a healthy way may be a really hard task. It will be easier if you aren't overweight due to psychological or mental causes. In that case simply realizing that eating a bit more of healthy food may help you a lot. Following a few simple tips may be enough to encourage change. It may be way more difficult if you can gain weight due to diseases or medical treatment, or poor mental health or eating disorders. In that case you will need a specialist to help you compose your diet for now on and help you to follow it. Below you will find some tips on how to gain some weight in a healthy way.

Tips on getting weight in a healthy way

- Try eating more frequent meals, but focus more on eating small amounts regularly than shovelling down a pile of food at one go.
- Eat more snacks, especially fruits, vegetables and nuts,
- Include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, nuts and seeds, and lean proteins to your diet,
- As drinking may decrease your appetite, try drinking 30 minutes before or after meal.
- Adding cheese, nuts, and seeds as toppings to your dishes will make them both richer in calories and tastier.
- Don't avoid exercising as this way you can increase your appetite and gain weight by adding muscle to your body.

How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents information on the topic of underweight and its influence on one's wellbeing. As nowadays people tend to focus more on a problem of being overweight, then underweight, it need to be stressed that providing your body too

little nourishments may also have severe consequences,

Reviewing this handbook before each session with the group will help you to lead a discussion with a group and answer their questions according way to check if we are underweight, what influence on our health may if have and how to deal with this issue.

However, you have to be aware that not all herbs and spices was mentioned in this handbook and that your students may provide you with examples of different spices they use. Be curious and open-minded. In the resources you will also find a PowerPoint presentation which will help you to explain the topic to your group and start a discussion.

Group Activity

After you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group, you can start a group discussion about the importance of seasoning.

Once they are finished ask them to think what spices and herbs members of their community use. Give them the idea to ask their group (especially if it consists of people of different nationality what spices and herbs does they like with their food, and which ones does they find beneficial for their health.

Let your group compose menu for one day (breakfast, lunch and dinner), using different kind of herbs and spices that goes well with food of their chose.





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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Project Number: 2018-1-UK01-KA204-048095