

# Tooth loss can indicate malnutrition, study says

October 25 2018, by Patti Verbanas

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Older adults are at risk for both impaired oral health and malnutrition, according to a study by Rutgers University researchers.

The study, recently published in the *Journal of Aging Research and Clinical Practice*, analyzed the health records of 107 community-dwelling senior citizens treated at the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine clinic between 2015 to 2016.

The results showed that more than 25 percent of the patients had malnutrition or were at risk for malnutrition. The researchers saw a trend in which patients with 10 to 19 teeth were more likely to be at risk for malnutrition. Those patients classified as having malnutrition had higher rates of weight loss, ate less and more frequently reported that they suffered with dementia and/or depression and severe illnesses than those who had a normal nutrition status.

"The mouth is the entry way for food and fluid intake," said lead author Rena Zelig, director of the Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition Program at Rutgers School of Health Professions. "If its integrity is impaired, the functional ability of an individual to consume an adequate diet may be adversely impacted."

Although further studies need to examine the relationships between [tooth loss](#) and malnutrition risk, Zelig said the findings show that dental clinics are ideal locations to perform [nutritional status](#) screenings as they can identify patients who may not regularly visit a primary care provider

and who may be at risk for malnutrition. "Clinicians also can provide [patients](#) with referrals to Registered Dietitians and community assistance programs such as Meals on Wheels to prevent further decline in nutritional status," she said.

This was the first part of a mixed-methods grant to research the associations between tooth loss and nutritional [status](#) in older adults. The second part of the grant built on these results and qualitatively studied the eating experience and eating-related quality of life of community-dwelling [older adults](#) using qualitative interviews.

The study sets the stage for further research to examine the relationships between tooth loss and [malnutrition](#) risk and the impact of [tooth](#) loss on the eating experience and eating-related quality of life.

**More information:** *Journal of Aging Research and Clinical Practice*, [DOI: 10.14283/jarcp.2018.19](https://doi.org/10.14283/jarcp.2018.19)

Provided by Rutgers University

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