

# Nutrition concern for older adults at home

November 21 2018

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Researchers are calling for screening of vulnerable older adults at risk of poor nutrition and diminished physical performance, in an effort to identify those in need of dietary intervention.

Massey University School of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition [researchers](#) co-authored a paper entitled Associations between [nutrition](#) risk status,

body composition and physical performance among community-dwelling [older adults](#), which was today published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Associate Professor Carol Wham led the study, which involved 257 community-dwelling (not living in a rest home or care facility) older adults, with a [median age](#) of 79 years, living in Auckland. Researchers carried out face to face interviews and body composition and physical performance assessments at the participants' home. The respondents were also asked to complete a questionnaire to assess malnutrition risk.

Dr. Wham says 12 per cent of study participants were either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition.

"Every yearly increase in age was associated with higher odds of nutrition risk. At least one in 10 participants had a low gait or walking speed indicative of low [physical performance](#). Those with better gait speed however had lower odds for nutrition risk. Gait or walking speed was positively correlated with muscle mass, body fat percentage and BMI [body mass index].

"At present nutrition screening is under-used. However targeting those who are vulnerable, such as those in advanced age with compromised walking [speed](#) and a low BMI and who are a clearly identifiable group, has the potential to improve health outcomes and may help prevent loss of independence," she says.

"Decline in nutritional status is a modifiable risk factor and in most cases, is amenable to intervention. But we need to identify those who are vulnerable, so that preventative or supportive strategies can be implemented when needed," Dr. Wham says.

She says advanced age adults are more susceptible due to the presence of

chronic disease, depression and social isolation. "Malnutrition can become entwined in a vicious cycle for older adults, as it is often interlinked with reduced immune function, weakening their defence. Vulnerable people may experience longer hospital admissions, higher mortality rates and are more likely to need long-term residential care."

**More information:** Nick Wilson et al. The health impacts of the First World War on New Zealand: a summary and a remaining research agenda, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12837](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12837)

Provided by Massey University

Citation: Nutrition concern for older adults at home (2018, November 21) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-nutrition-older-adults-home.html>

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