

Many older hospitalized patients with cancer experience malnutrition

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Results from a new study indicate that older hospitalized patients with cancer may have a high risk of being malnourished and experiencing symptoms such as no appetite and nausea, according to findings published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society.

Many individuals with [cancer](#) experience [malnutrition](#), which can negatively affect clinical outcomes during treatment. To study the issue, Nivaldo de Pinho, Ph.D., MSc, of the National Cancer Institute José Alencar Gomes da Silva, in Rio de Janeiro, and his colleagues evaluated the prevalence of malnutrition across different age groups in patients with cancer in Brazil. They also examined symptoms that interfere with obtaining sufficient nutrition, or "nutrition impact symptoms." The study included 4,783 patients with cancer who were hospitalized in November 2012 in public hospitals in Brazil. The average age of patients was 56.7 years.

The overall prevalence of malnutrition was 45 percent, with a higher prevalence in individuals

aged 65 years and older (55 percent) and a lower prevalence in those aged 50 years and younger (36 percent). According to results from a questionnaire that assessed nourishment, patients with a high score—indicating a critical need to improve nutrition—had a higher prevalence of nutrition impact symptoms, with no appetite being the most prevalent (58.1 percent), followed by nausea (38.3 percent), dry mouth (37.1 percent), and vomiting (26.0 percent).

The results highlight the need for assessments of malnutrition and underlying [risk factors](#) soon after patients with cancer are hospitalized, in order to take steps to ensure that patients have adequate [nutrition](#).

"With these findings, we can indicate to professionals that intensive nutritional counseling from the age of 50 years and older is needed to prevent and treat symptoms of nutritional impact. This can improve caloric and protein intake and prevent malnutrition and [weight loss](#) so common to these patients," said Dr. de Pinho.

More information: "High prevalence of malnutrition and nutrition impact symptoms in older patients with cancer: results of a Brazilian multicenter study." Nivaldo B. de Pinho, Renata B. Martucci, Viviane D. Rodrigues, Cristiane A. D'Almeida, Luiz C. S. Thuler, Claudia Saunders, Harriet Jager-Wittenaar, Wilza A. F. Peres. *Cancer* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.32437](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.32437)

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