

Dietary deficits put over-50s at risk

A critical new report¹ on the nutritional status of the nation's over-50s reveals that many adults desperately need advice on how to eat for their age and should be taking a daily multivitamin to bridge the massive dietary gaps.

“Rising life expectancy is masking a hidden, and growing, health concern — we are living longer, but we are not living better,” notes Dr Gill Jenkins, GP and one of the report's authors.

“A woman who was 65 in 2011 can expect to spend more than 18 years — more than a fifth of her life — in frail health while a man of the same age faces 15 years in poor health,” adds Dr Jenkins.

The **Hidden Health Challenges report** paints a shocking picture of the myriad health challenges which are undermining the well-being of thousands of older adults.

The report sets out dietary advice and strategies to address the barriers to healthy ageing detailed in a 2014 European Union report which identified “undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency” as “a common problem in older adults.”³

The EU report authors warned: “A set of age-specific, up-to-date dietary recommendations is essential to achieve active and healthy ageing.”⁴

However, the shocking reality exposed by the Hidden Health Challenges report is that many older Britons

are falling short of the nutritional goals needed to maintain optimal health. It warns:

- More than half the older adults admitted to hospital in the UK are malnourished.⁵
- Deficits of vitamin D, iron, magnesium, potassium, zinc, calcium and copper are common.⁶
- Intakes of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids fall short of recommended targets.⁷
- Malnutrition is alive and killing.⁸
- Malnutrition costs the UK economy £5billion a year in direct healthcare costs and £13billion in associated health and social care.⁹

The Hidden Health Challenges report, written by an expert panel and including opinions from Professor Katherine Appleton, a nutritionist and psychologist based at Bournemouth University, was commissioned by the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB) and the Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS).

It explores how our nutritional needs change as we age, how our ability to obtain sufficient key vitamins and minerals deteriorates as we get older, and it provides the clear, evidence-based and age-specific advice for healthy ageing that EU experts have called for.

Key findings include:

- Shortfalls of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids are widespread,¹⁰ despite clear evidence they help calm inflammation,¹¹ a key driver in many age-related health problems such as heart disease¹² and cancer.¹³

¹The Hidden Health Challenges Report commissioned by the Health Supplements Information Service

²<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/disability-and-health-measurement/sub-national-health-expectancies/disability-free-life-expectancy-by-upper-tier-local-authority--england-2009-11/stb-disability-free-life-expectancy.html#tab-England>

³JRC Science and Policy Reports: The Role of Nutrition in Active and Healthy Ageing 2014.

⁴JRC Science and Policy Reports: The Role of Nutrition in Active and Healthy Ageing 2014.

⁵https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/12537/malnutrition.pdf

⁶Ruxton C.H.S., Derbyshire E. & Toribio-Mateas M. (2015) Role of fatty acids and micronutrients in healthy ageing: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials set in the context of European dietary surveys of older adults. J Hum Nutr Diet. doi: 10.1111/jhn.12335

⁷Ruxton C.H.S., Derbyshire E. & Toribio-Mateas M. (2015) Role of fatty acids and micronutrients in healthy ageing: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials set in the context of

European dietary surveys of older adults. J Hum Nutr Diet. doi: 10.1111/jhn.12335

⁸https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/12537/malnutrition.pdf

⁹Review and summary of the impact of malnutrition in older people and the reported costs and benefits of interventions <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCoQFiABahUKewiR2Mj-muXIAhXG2BoKHWicCSw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ilcuk.org.uk%2Fimages%2Fuploads%2Fpublication-pdfs%2FCosts%20and%20Benefits%20Report%20June%202013.pdf&usq=AFQjCNHKObrrXTFiR2pVqsGf7ImU4N8-BQ&cad=rja>

¹⁰https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338801/SACN_Advice_on_Fish_Consumption.pdf

¹¹<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12442909>

¹²<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16470012>

¹³<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1994795/>

- Nine out of ten older people have inadequate intakes of vitamin D¹⁴, which is important for the immune system, cardiovascular health and strong bones.¹⁵ Shortfalls are exacerbated by the fact that our ability to synthesise vitamin D from sunshine decreases with age.¹⁶
- Our ability to absorb vitamin B12 declines with age. As a result, 15 per cent of over-60s are deficient¹⁷ — which increases their risk of anaemia¹⁸. Low blood levels have also been linked to brain shrinkage.¹⁹
- Antioxidants reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration — the leading cause of blindness in the UK²⁰ — by 25 per cent.²¹

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Dietitian, Dr Carrie Ruxton, from the Health Supplements Information Service and a co-author of the Hidden Health Challenges report says: “Nutrition is an absolute fundamental for good health. Our bodies need the right fuel in the right amounts, and the correct balance of key nutrients, to function effectively. It is a scandal that in the UK today there are so many older adults at risk of failing health because their diet is not delivering the nutrients they need.

“Food alone cannot meet all the nutritional needs of an ageing population,” she warns.

Dr Gill Jenkins says: "The take-home message is clear. Supplements, such as taking a daily multivitamin, can provide an effective strategy for maintaining health, supporting nutrient intakes, plugging dietary gaps and helping to address the nutritional challenges associated with ageing."

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The Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) (www.hsis.org.uk; Tel: 020 7052 8955) is an independent information body, set up to provide balanced information on vitamins and minerals. It is supported by a restricted educational grant from the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB).

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¹⁴Mensink GB et al. (2013). Mapping low intake of micronutrients across Europe. *Br J Nutr.* 110, 755-773.

¹⁵ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1495109/>

¹⁶<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2997282>

¹⁷<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10448529>

¹⁸<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Anaemia-vitamin-B12-and-folate-deficiency/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

¹⁹<http://www.nhs.uk/news/2010/09September/Pages/vitamin-B12-brain-shrink-dementia.aspx>

²⁰<http://www.rnib.org.uk/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics>

²¹<https://nei.nih.gov/areds2/PatientFAQ>