

Malnutrition and Surgery

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition [mal-new-TRIH-shuhn] is when a person is not getting enough nutrients [NEW-tree-entz] in their diet. Nutrients are the vitamins, minerals, fats, and proteins the body needs to work correctly. Malnutrition can be caused by not getting enough of the right things to eat, or when the body can't use the food that is eaten.

What do I need to know about malnutrition and surgery?

Body mass index (BMI) is a screening tool that uses your height and weight to see if you are at risk for health problems. (See the BMI table at right.) Patients with a BMI of less than 18.5 (underweight) may be malnourished. Studies suggest that malnourished patients who have surgery often have problems after surgery, including:

- A greater risk of complications and death
- More frequent returns to the hospital
- Increased length of stay in the hospital

Surgery recommendations

Your primary care provider will check your BMI before scheduling a surgery consultation. If your BMI is below 18.5, you may need to have a lab test called a serum albumin [al-BY00-min] screening. This test is done to further check your nutritional health. You may also need to start taking certain nutritional supplements before surgery can be scheduled.

Standard BMI measures

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Underweight | BMI is less than 18.5 |
| Normal weight | BMI is 18.5 to 24.9 |
| Overweight | BMI is 25 to 29.9 |
| Obese | BMI is 30 to 34.9 |
| Highly obese | BMI is 35 to 39.9 |
| Morbidly obese | BMI is 40 or greater |

Where can I find more information?

• Intermountain Live Well Virtual Nutrition counseling services:

- LiVe Well Center - Park City
(435) 333-3535
- LiVe Well Center - Salt Lake City
(385) 282-2700
- LiVe Well Center - Saint George
(435) 251-3793
- LiVe Well Center - Utah Valley
(801) 357-4141

• ChooseMyPlate, [choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov):

Learn how to eat healthier by following the simple “choose my plate” guidelines created by the USDA.

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