

Overview

- Weight loss is one of the major impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on long term care residents.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, unexpected weight loss in our sites has nearly **doubled**.
- Weight loss can cause complications including increased confusion, increased risk of infection, increased risk of skin breakdown, and functional declines in ADLs.
- Therapists can play a role in combating this unintended weight loss both inside and outside of skilled intervention.

Skilled Considerations:

- Factors that put residents at increased risk for weight loss:
 - Dysphagia
 - Contractures/Weakness – upper extremity
 - Dementia – Yellow or Red categories
 - Oral pain/poorly fitting dentures
 - **Depression/Isolation**
- SLP to evaluate and treat for dysphagia and cognitive-communication deficits that may impact eating and swallowing.
- OT to address physiological deficits that contribute to self-feeding including low vision.
- Even if not directly addressing feeding/swallowing in therapy, time therapy sessions to assist patient in getting dressed and **out of bed** for meals. This encourages alertness and safety for improved intake.
- Include sensory stimulation in your therapy activities **and functional maintenance plans**. Cinnamon and Peppermint can help stimulate appetite and alertness.
- Incorporate snacks and beverages into your regular therapeutic activities. Make eating a social event as much as possible while following precautions. Here are just a few ideas:
 - Cognition – follow recipes for smoothies or other “no bake” snacks
 - Standing tolerance/balance – stand and assemble recipes or work in kitchen
 - Communication – cooking activities can facilitate receptive and expressive communication in natural environments through following directions, reminiscing, and social turn-taking.
 - ADLs – utilize utensils and basic kitchen appliances (mixers, microwaves, toasters, etc.).
 - Consider adding oats, frozen fruit and yogurt into smoothies to increase thickness and caloric content.
 - No bake energy/protein bite recipes are readily available and are simple to make and contain high nutritional value.
 - See the attached list of high calorie, healthy snacks for more ideas.

General Supportive Interventions:

- Encourage families to send outside foods when possible. This helps families stay connected to their loved ones and encourages intake of familiar foods. Arrange a “station” for families to deliver labeled food, even if visitations are not possible.
- Encourage diet liberalization. This may be obvious but if residents are eating less, then a therapeutic diet is usually not needed. A non-therapeutic diet will taste better and they may eat more. Refer to your dietician for appropriate assessment.
- Keep healthy, but high calorie snacks and drinks/shakes stocked in the therapy gym and offer regularly. Work with your dietary department to find what options are available. Remain aware of diet modifications and specific medical considerations (i.e. diabetes, renal diet, etc.).
- Encourage exercise and activity, inside and outside therapy– this helps stimulate appetite! Coordinate with activities on ideas that can help residents get up and move more.