

EFAD Statement on the Role of the Dietitian in the Prevention and Management of Nutrition-related Disorders in Older Adults

Ageing

The proportion of older adults in the EU-28 is expanding.¹ Most older adults are healthy and active, but ageing is an irreversible and progressive process, affecting social, mental, emotional and physiological abilities, which may impact on the older adults' ability to optimize nutritional intake. The importance of physical activity for healthy ageing should also be stressed.

The science of gerontology and geriatrics involves age-related changes in physiology and metabolism leading to sarcopenia and frailty age-related changes in nutritional requirements and their nutritional implications, common age-related diseases and their nutritional impact, and the physical, social, and socio-economic predictors of malnutrition in older adults.

Role of the Dietitian in the Prevention and Management of Nutrition-related Disorders in Older Adults

The role of the dietitian is essential in both primary and secondary prevention. This aims to decrease the risk of non-communicable diseases including conditions as sarcopenia² and malnutrition, as well as prevention and treatment of malnutrition including risk of dehydration.

Dietitians working with older adults have strategic, educational, clinical and administrative roles.

Moreover, qualified dietitians work actively in all care settings for older adults: acute hospital, community, residential care sites, nursing homes, community primary care teams, and rehabilitation teams.³

The role of the dietitian in the prevention and management of nutrition-related disorders in older adults includes:

- Initiate and coordinate nutritional screening programmes to identify the malnutrition risk and risk factors for malnutrition
- Apply the nutritional care process in all care settings for older adults (assessment, diagnosis, intervention, monitoring and evaluation)⁴
- Develop evidence based standards and procedures and protocols for the quality management of nutritional care.
- Advise on the development of national nutritional recommendations for food policy in acute and community settings.
- Contribute to the development of specialist nutritional modules for the older adults within the training of healthcare professionals.
- Develop nutrition in gerontology, to maintain health and prevent disease in older adults.
- Develop the geriatric nutritional science, by initiating and conducting research on nutrition in ageing.

Dietitians Core Competencies working with older adults

Dietitians working with older adults must demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes, which underpin gerontology and geriatric nutrition, and to work with a multi-professional approach.

Dietitians specialising in the care of older adults, should deliver a 'person-centred' approach,⁵ which includes the patient and caregivers as partner in the care process. This approach requires an understanding of the individual's food habits in a social and medical context.

Dietitians can contribute to the quality improvement of nutritional services, including patient safety.

Dietitians specialising in the care of older adults work in collaboration with other healthcare professionals as member of the multidisciplinary geriatric team.

Dietitians should be aware of the important ethical considerations in the nutrition care of older adults, emphasizing the importance of quality of life.



The ESDN Older Adults of EFAD supports and collaborates with international initiatives on optimizing care for older adults, e.g., [ONCA](#) (Optimal Nutritional Care for All) and [MaNuEI](#) (Malnutrition in the Elderly).

References

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About The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD)

EFAD is the voice of 35.000 European dietitians - more than half the profession – and is the only organisation advocating for dietitians in Europe.

EFAD was established in 1978 with aims to:

- Promote the development of the dietetic profession
- Develop dietetics on a scientific and professional level in the common interest of the member associations
- Facilitate communication between national dietetic associations and other organisations – professional, educational, and governmental
- Encourage a better nutrition situation for the population of the member countries of Europe.

Membership of the Federation is open all National Associations of Dietitians from member states of Europe. EFAD currently has 34 member associations, representing over 35,000 dietitians in 27 European countries.

Definition of a Dietitian:

A dietitian is a person with a qualification in Nutrition & Dietetics recognised by a national authority.

The dietitian applies the science of nutrition to the feeding and education of groups of people and individuals in both health and disease.

For further information please visit the web site: www.efad.org

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