

EFAD ESDN Oncology Statement Paper on the Role of the Dietitian in Oncology

Dietitians, as experts and leaders in human nutrition, are uniquely qualified to develop and implement strategies to optimise dietary intake for adults and children diagnosed with cancer. They have a key role in the multi-disciplinary team to ensure that nutrition is optimised from diagnosis and the beginning of the treatment pathway through to rehabilitation, cancer survivorship as well as to palliative care and end of life. They work in a variety of care settings including cancer centres, general hospitals, hospices and the community.

Dietitians are essential to the development of policy and guidelines for the management of malnutrition, disease related nutritional problems (short and long term) and quality of life associated with cancer and its treatment in addition to research and education of all health care professionals.

Role of the dietitian

The complex interaction between dietary intake, nutritional status and cancer¹ requires the dietitian to be a specialist in oncology.

- Dietitians utilise their evidence based knowledge and skills to assess nutritional status as many people with cancer are at risk of developing malnutrition².
- Dietitians assess nutritional requirements because changes in dietary intake and metabolism can arise as a result of cancer and be identified as cancer cachexia.
- Dietitians advise and plan suitable nutritional support including dietary counselling, oral nutritional supplements, enteral and parenteral nutrition support appropriate to all types of cancer.
- Dietitians monitor nutritional status and evaluate the effectiveness of nutritional support to improve / preserve nutrition status and to optimise clinical outcomes; poor nutritional status can impact on tolerance to cancer treatment^{3,4}
- Dietitians advise people with cancer on adequate food choices to reduce adverse effects of food borne micro-organisms.
- Dietitians advise on the optimal diet for people who gain weight during treatment as this can influence the risk of recurrence, for example, in breast and prostate cancer and worsen prognosis⁵.

¹Fearon, K., et al. (2011). "Definition and classification of cancer cachexia: an international consensus." *Lancet Oncol* **12**(5): 489-495.

²Shaw, C. et al, (2014). "Comparison of a novel, simple nutrition screening tool for adult oncology inpatients and the Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST) against the Patient-Generated Subjective Global Assessment (PG-SGA)." *Support Care Cancer*.

³Martin, L., (2015) Diagnostic criteria for the classification of cancer-associated weight loss. *J Clin Oncol* Jan 1; 33 (1): 90-9

⁴Prado, C. M., et al. (2009). "Sarcopenia as a determinant of chemotherapy toxicity and time to tumor progression in metastatic breast cancer patients receiving capecitabine treatment." *Clin Cancer Res* **15**(8): 2920-2926.

⁵<http://www.wcrf.org/int/research-we-fund/cancer-prevention-recommendations/cancer-survivors>



- Dietary intervention can improve nutritional status which impacts on overall survival, disease-free survival and quality of life⁶
- Dietitians support patients with advanced cancer receiving palliative care to eat and drink according to goals based on comfort. Dietitians are core members of the multidisciplinary team and are ideally placed to discuss ethics of nutrition
- Dietitians support people with cancer to make informed choices regarding unproven dietary interventions and when to take vitamin and mineral supplementation.
- Dietitians contribute to the teaching of all health care professionals on to the identification and management of nutrition in cancer.
- Dietitians initiate and contribute to research projects on nutrition and cancer.

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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⁶Arends J, et al., ESPEN guidelines on nutrition in cancer patients, Clinical Nutrition (2016)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2016.07.015>