

Pediatric Nutrition Screening Tool

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Nutrition Screening?

- Nutrition screening is a way to identify children who may be at risk of malnutrition and could benefit from seeing a dietitian during their hospital admission.
- It utilizes simple questions that can be asked by any healthcare professional, regardless of knowledge in nutrition, during admission.
- It identifies children who may be at risk of malnutrition but does not diagnose malnutrition. A dietitian assessment is needed to determine if malnutrition is present.

What is the Pediatric Nutrition Screening Tool (PNST)?

- It is a nutrition screening tool developed in Australia and validated in Alberta (2018).
- Consists of four questions:
 1. Has the child unintentionally lost weight lately? (Y/N)
 2. Has the child had poor weight gain over the last few months? (Y/N)
 3. Has the child been eating/feeding less in the last few weeks? (Y/N)
 4. Is the child obviously underweight? (Y/N)

How do I complete the PNST?

- Ask the first three questions to the patient or family/caregiver.
- If you are comfortable looking at growth charts, you can review the patient's growth chart (if available) to help inform the answers. This is not required.
- The fourth question is not asked to the family. This question is a subjective assessment done by the healthcare professional completing the screen to be answered if they think the patient looks obviously underweight.
- One or more "yes" response indicates there is nutrition risk, and the child should be seen by a dietitian.

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How to assess “unintentional weight loss lately”?

- Unintentional weight loss should not occur in most children and requires further investigation if present.
- “Lately” can be over a period of six months, or days.
- If there is no weight history, a subjective assessment can be made by the parents, caregivers, or health professionals if they think there has been weight loss.
- A question like “Are clothes that used to fit loose now?” is an example of how to subjectively determine weight loss.

How to assess “poor weight gain over the last few months”?

- Appropriate weight gain depends on the child’s age. Younger children tend to grow faster than older children and teenagers.
- Infants should be constantly growing, and lack of weight gain is cause for further investigation.
- A question like “Is your child growing into the next size of clothes appropriately?” is an example of how to subjectively determine poor weight gain.

How to assess “eating/feeding less in the last few weeks”?

- Determine if the child’s intake is reduced compared to their usual intake. Nutritional intake can be via numerous routes including oral, enteral/tube feeds, or parenteral nutrition.
- Reduced intake of only a few days may not be a cause for concern, especially in older children. Ask about the past few weeks to determine if the reduced intake is present and if it is improving, declining, or not changing.

How to assess if the “child is obviously underweight”?

- Look for obvious signs of fat and muscle wasting. This includes a hollow narrow face, obvious depressions between the ribs, a flat buttock (in infants), protruding clavicle and scapular bones, depressions along the inner thigh, or a small calf muscle.
- There are no right or wrong responses. Use your clinical judgement to answer as best as possible.

Where can I find the PNST?

- In Connect Care:
 - Nurses: Navigators → Admission → Screenings → Nutrition
 - Other Healthcare professionals: Flowsheets → Ped Screening
- On Insite: [Pediatric Nutrition Screening Tool \(PNST\)](#)

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Where and when should the PNST be used?

- For all pediatric patients (1 month to 18 years) admitted to hospital.
- Completed during the admission process.
- For every admission including transfers between Alberta hospitals, or transfers from intensive care units within the same hospital.

Who will do the screening?

- Completed by a nurse or healthcare professional conducting the admission process.

How long does it take to complete?

- Usually takes less than two minutes to complete.

What if the patient or family is hesitant to answer the questions?

- Reassure families that nutrition screening is standard practice for everyone, they are not being singled out.
- The questions are meant to be broad, and families can answer them as best as possible if they are unsure. There are no right or wrong responses.
- Responding “yes” to a question is not bad or negative. Families should be supported to feel comfortable being honest, knowing the screen is being done to help give their child the best support possible.
- Even if the screen indicates nutrition risk, that does not mean the child has malnutrition. Some children who have nutrition risk indicators are well-nourished and do not need any further interventions. A dietitian assessment will help determine this.

What do I do once the PNST is done?

- If the screen indicates nutrition risk (one or more “yes” responses), consult your unit dietitian as per current unit processes.
- If all responses are “no”, there is no identified nutrition risk. The patient will continue to receive routine care. A dietitian consult can still occur if felt necessary by the healthcare team, as per current practice.

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What happens next?

- Those who are identified as at risk for malnutrition will be seen by a dietitian.
- Not all children who are identified through the PNST have malnutrition. The dietitian will use the Subjective Global Nutritional Assessment (SGNA) to determine the patient's nutrition status.
- If the patient is well nourished, no further intervention may be needed. Patients who have malnutrition are encouraged to work with the dietitian to determine the best next steps and interventions.

Will my workload be affected?

- Nursing and healthcare professionals administering the PNST should not encounter an increased workload.
- Dietitians may experience an increase in consults and, as such, workload could be affected. However, the PNST may detect patients who have malnutrition who would have been previously missed.

Where can I find more information?

- Discuss with your unit dietitian or site's Nutrition Services manager if you have questions, or to receive further education and resources.