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Good nutrition for good surgery

Clear links have been made between inadequate nutrition, and a risk of poor surgical outcomes including infection, complications and longer hospital stays, according to Associate Professor Lynne Daniels of Flinders University.

Despite this, in the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*, Professor Daniels claims the clinical and financial costs of undernutrition "are frequently unrecognised, underrated and unacknowledged".

According to Professor Daniels, "self-reported unintentional weight loss, being underweight on admission, and a decline in nutritional status during admission, have all been associated with poor (surgical) outcomes". In order to get the best possible outcomes health professionals must strive to ensure the adequate nutrition of all patients.

A 1994 study reported that 40% of 500 patients were at least mildly inadequately nourished. Another study of 221 surgical patients showed that over a quarter of patients lost weight before and during their hospital stay.

Professor Daniels says the prospective association between surgical outcomes and nutrition highlights the role GPs can play in the screening and prevention of undernourishment. If GPs are aware of the nutritional status of their patients they may "be able to prevent or ameliorate undernutrition before admission", thus decreasing the length of time the patient spends in hospital.

Other topics in this issue of *Australian Prescriber* include prescribing for children, traditional Chinese medicines, and calcium.

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