

## **New Study Shows Seniors have a High Incidence of Malnutrition.**

A recent study conducted by the Canadian Malnutrition Task Force (a committee of the Canadian Nutrition Society) shows that a disturbingly high percentage of seniors, who are admitted to hospitals for other conditions, have some degree of malnutrition.

Specifically 12.5% of patients 65 and older were classified as severely malnourished and 39% were moderately malnourished. This is significantly higher than the patients in the study who were under 65.

This data clearly shows that seniors are not receiving adequate nutritional care. It's reasonable to suggest that this is contributing, in some measure, to the conditions resulting in hospital admission, such as gastrointestinal, respiratory and cardiovascular.

There needs to be greater understanding by seniors and anyone involved in their care of the unique nutritional dynamics for seniors. But there also need to be a sensitivity to the challenges they have with the eating process itself. The survey showed that 12 % said there was not enough time to eat a meal and 29% said the portion size was too big (compared to 6.5% for the under 65's). Thirty two per cent of seniors also had problems cutting and swallowing or chewing their food.

Reinforcing this worrisome situation was another finding – 32 % of seniors lost more than five pounds one month after discharge from the hospital!

Dr. Heather Keller, co-author of this multi-year study which is in its first year, notes that within the healthcare system, “ nutrition is often seen as a lower-priority therapy”, with fewer than 1 % of governmental homecare visits involving dieticians.

There is an enormous opportunity for properly trained caregivers to make a significant difference on the mealtime experience for seniors living at home.