



Communicating screening results

Research conducted by Holly Reimer MSc, RD on seniors' experiences of participating in nutrition screening and learning they are at risk has led to some recommendations for how to explain results to seniors after they complete SCREEN II©.

It was found that seniors react to their screening results in various ways. Seniors who feel they are eating the right things may be surprised by their results. Some seniors may be very attentive, while others are unconcerned. When the score is much lower than expected, there is potential for seniors to feel upset or worried. In all cases, it was found that these reactions are accompanied by some attempt by the older adults to rationalize their results. There is a tendency for seniors to explain away a low score and see room for improvement rather than seeing themselves at increased nutrition risk.

A common reason why seniors are surprised about their results is that they see their screening score as an evaluation of how well they are doing the right things. It may be confusing to them that items that they have less control over such as poor appetite or eating alone bring their score down. These things are more likely to be viewed as special challenges to overcome in their efforts to eat well.

In light of this, it is important to consider how screening results and risk identification are communicated to older adults. It is believed that careful communication may lead to less *rationalizing, or explaining away or denying* of results that may be a barrier to changing eating behaviours. Further, using language that reflects the way seniors tend to think about their screening results may promote better understanding of how they were identified to be at risk. Since seniors tend to be most interested in finding out how well they are eating and where there is room for improvement, we recommend that this be the starting point for communicating screening results.

Focus first on the screening questions that directly involve dietary intake:

- Question #2: skipping meals
- Question #5: fruit and vegetable intake
- Question #6: meat and alternatives intake
- Question #7: milk and alternatives intake
- Question #8: fluid intake
- Question #11: using meal replacements or supplements

Point out what they are doing well and identify habits to continue regarding their dietary intake. Add up the scores for these six questions and tell them what they scored out of the maximum score of 24. Then explain where there is some room for improvement and refer them to appropriate resources for more information. For example, you could begin by saying:

You are doing well by not skipping meals and having something from the meat and alternatives food group two or more times a day. It is also good that you are having regular meals rather than using meal replacements or supplements such as energy bars. Those are good habits to continue. You scored 19/24 for the dietary intake questions, showing there is some room for improvement. Eating less than recommended from certain food groups and not drinking enough fluids increases your risk of not having the nutrients you need for good health. You can decrease your risk by having at least five servings of fruits and vegetables and three servings of milk products each day. Aim for at least eight cups of fluid throughout the day.

Next, focus on the remaining questions, which seniors consider as *challenges* that influence their food intake:

- Question #1a: weight change
- Question #1b: intention to change weight
- Question #1c: opinion about weight
- Question #3: limiting or avoiding certain foods
- Question #4: appetite
- Question #9: swallowing difficulties
- Question #10: chewing difficulties
- Question #12: eating alone
- Question #13: finding cooking a chore
- Question #14: difficulties with grocery shopping

Explain that there are some special challenges that people may need to deal with as they work toward better nutrition. We suggest adding up the scores for the questions listed above and provide the total out of 40. Indicate what challenges the senior is facing based on individual questions where they scored less than 4. Explain that these challenges increase their risk of poor nutrition and refer them to appropriate resources for more information or assistance.

In research and practice, we have used written letters or forms as a means of communicating screening results. As an option, we have developed a written template that may be used to help communicate nutrition screening results to seniors. You are free to use this resource if it fits your needs, as long as the source is acknowledged.

Name: _____

Nutrition Screening Results

Thank-you for completing the nutrition screening questionnaire!

This questionnaire helps identify nutrition problems at an early stage. Overall, you scored _____ /64 on this questionnaire. Scores of 50-53 show mild to moderate risk of not meeting nutritional needs to maintain good health, and scores of less than 50 indicate high risk.

To understand your score better, we have broken it down into two parts: food intake and special challenges that may influence your intake.

Food Intake

Six questions were directly related to your food and fluid intake. Your total score for these questions was _____ /24.

Doing the right things

Some good habits to continue are:

Room for improvement

You can decrease your risk by:

Special Challenges

Ten questions were related to challenges that older adults may face that can make it harder to eat well or may be a sign of nutrition problems. Your total score for these questions was _____ /40. The special challenges you reported dealing with are checked below.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight gain or weight loss in the past six months | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor appetite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining or losing weight without trying | <input type="checkbox"/> Swallowing problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling that your weight is more or less than it should be | <input type="checkbox"/> Chewing problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limiting or avoiding certain foods | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating alone |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Finding cooking a chore |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties with grocery shopping |

Some steps you can take to help deal with these special challenges and decrease your risk are: