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Nutrition and Frailty: Opportunities for Prevention and Treatment

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Discussion Research ID	DPR-2026-1439
Year	2021
Field	Medicine
DOI	10.3390/nu13072349
Author ORCID	0000-0001-5702-1759
Licence	CC-BY
Original source	Nutrients
Permanent link	https://discussionpublishers.com/research/af4a1401-0f48-4c4c-86d2-a1f8026a479b
Publisher	Discussion Publishers discussionpublishers.com

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Cite as: Mary N Lochlainn, Natalie J. Cox, Thomas Wilson, Richard P. (2021). Nutrition and Frailty: Opportunities for Preventio. D

Abstract

Frailty is a syndrome of growing importance given the global ageing population. While frailty is a multifactorial process, poor nutritional status is considered a key contributor to its pathophysiology. As nutrition is a modifiable risk factor for frailty, strategies to prevent and treat frailty should consider dietary change. Observational evidence linking nutrition with frailty appears most robust for dietary quality: for example, dietary patterns such as the Mediterranean diet appear to be protective. In addition, research on specific foods, such as a higher consumption of fruit and vegetables and lower consumption of ultra-processed foods are consistent, with healthier profiles linked to lower frailty risk. Few dietary intervention studies have been conducted to date, although a growing number of trials that combine supplementation with exercise training suggest a multi-domain approach may be more effective. This review is based on an interdisciplinary workshop, held in November 2020, and synthesises current understanding of dietary influences on frailty, focusing on opportunities for prevention and treatment. Longer term prospective studies and well-designed trials are needed to determine the causal effects of nutrition on frailty risk and progression and how dietary change can be used to prevent and/or treat frailty in the future.

Keywords: frailty, nutrition, diet quality, Mediterranean diet, fruit and vegetable intake, ultra-processed fo

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Original record: https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13072349
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13072349