

# Nutrition supports including meal preparation

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**Quick summary:** Everybody needs food and drink to stay healthy. Your disability may mean you have trouble preparing food for yourself, eating enough, or understanding the nutrition you need. This could be because of physical, cognitive, or psychosocial disability. We may fund nutrition supports to help with this.

Nutrition supports might include nutritional supplements or a dietitian to create a meal plan for you. It might also include someone to help you follow a meal plan. Or it may be someone to help you plan, shop for, and prepare meals if your disability means you have trouble doing this yourself. In some situations, nutrition supports may include you getting meals prepared and delivered.

If you can't take all your food in through your mouth, you might use home enteral nutrition which goes through a tube straight into your stomach. Home enteral nutrition is often called HEN. Nutrition supports may include products and equipment for HEN. It could also include help to give you HEN and look after any equipment for it.

**Note:** when we say 'your plan' we mean your NDIS plan. If you're looking for information about your Community Connections plan, go to [Our Guideline – Community Connections](#).

If you're looking for information about your child's early connections plan, go to [Our Guideline – Early Connections](#).

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You might also be interested in:

- [Disability-related health supports](#)

- [Mainstream and community supports](#)
- [Would we fund it guide – food and meal preparation](#)

## What do we mean by nutrition supports?

Nutrition supports are supports which can help you get nutrition if your disability affects the type of nutrition you need and how you eat. It can be help from someone to understand the types of food you need to stay healthy. You may also need help to prepare meals and follow a meal plan. Nutrition supports can also include equipment and products to help you get the nutrition you need. For example, your disability may mean you need nutritional supplements to get enough nutrition.

There are many ways you can get the nutrition you need to stay healthy. Like most people you may take in food orally, which means through your mouth. If you can't get enough nutrition in through your mouth, your medical team may decide you need home enteral nutrition or HEN. HEN gives your body nutrition, through a feeding tube into your stomach.

A feeding tube can go through your nose into your stomach, called a nasogastric tube or NGT. Or the tube could go through your skin straight into your stomach. This type of feeding tube is called a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy or PEG. You may have a PEG if you have dysphagia, which is difficulty chewing or swallowing.

You may use a combination of ways to get the food and drink you need. How you eat will affect the nutrition supports you use.

Disability-related nutrition supports may include:

- a dietitian to work with you to create a disability-related meal plan
- support to help you follow a meal plan
- HEN and PEG equipment
- products to help you eat safely and get the nutrition you need like food thickeners
- support to manage your HEN or PEG.

Learn more about [what types of nutrition supports we may fund.](#)

## What help can you get to manage nutrition supports through the health system or other services?

You may be able to get nutrition supports from the Australian health system or another provider.

The health system helps support everyone to eat well through a wide range of healthy eating programs and information.<sup>1</sup> This means there are nutrition supports for healthy eating which are available to everyone, whether they have a disability or not. For example, you may want advice on general healthy eating to improve your diet and be healthier. You could use information from the Australian Government like [Eat for Health](#). Or you may be able to get this support through the health system. For example, from your doctor. If another service is best to fund your nutrition supports, we can't fund them.<sup>2</sup>

We may fund nutrition supports for you if you need them because they are related to your disability. For example, if you have cerebral palsy you may struggle to maintain your weight and eat enough due to your disability. Because the nutrition support is related to your disability, we may fund a dietitian to create a meal plan to help you maintain your weight. Learn more in [Our Guideline – Disability related health supports](#).

## What help can you get through Medicare?

Medicare helps all Australians with the costs of their health care.

If you are worried about your nutrition, you should talk to your doctor first. They can check your overall health and for any medical issues. They may refer you for tests in the health system and other health services.

Medicare funds some allied health professional services for short term nutrition supports. However, if you need ongoing nutrition supports because of your disability, we may be able to fund them. We will need evidence that you need these supports, such as reports or assessments from your doctor or dietitian.

If you need HEN, your medical team will decide this when you are in hospital or another clinical health setting. The dietitian in your medical team will work out the HEN you need. This includes the type, how much and how often. If you have a PEG, your medical team will work out the supports you need to look after it. This includes the area where the PEG enters your body. Medicare is responsible for funding nutrition supports while you are in hospital or in a clinical setting.<sup>3</sup>

Medicare is also responsible for your nutrition supports if you go back into hospital. For example, if you need your PEG removed or replaced.

You can continue accessing health care supports and services from Medicare, even when you're a NDIS participant.

Learn more about [Medicare](#).

## What help can you get through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme?

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme funds a few nutritional supplements and HEN formulas. If you can get what you need through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, we won't fund it.

Learn more about the [Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme](#).

## How do we decide what nutrition supports we fund?

All NDIS funded supports must meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#).

Nutrition supports are one type of disability-related health supports we may fund.

Learn more about [how we decide what disability-related health supports we fund](#).

You can also learn more in our [Would we fund it guide – food and meal preparation](#).

## What types of nutrition supports do we fund?

If you need help to manage your nutrition because of your disability, we may be able to fund:

- products you use like nutritional supplements, thickener products and HEN formula
- a support worker to help manage your HEN or PEG, if you, your family, or carers can't do this
- support to make sure you stay healthy if you have a PEG or use HEN.

We may also fund a dietitian to create and review a nutritional meal plan for you. Your family, friends or carers may be able to help you prepare meals according to the meal plan. If you don't have family, friends or carers help or they can't help you to prepare meals, we may fund support to help you. We will only do this if your disability affects your ability to understand healthy eating or to eat, cook or prepare meals on your own.

We'll generally fund training for the people who help you with your nutrition support needs if your disability means you have trouble looking after your nutrition yourself. Training could be for a family member, carer, or support worker. The training may include how to help you follow a nutritional meal plan. Or it could be a nurse to train a support worker in how to help with a HEN plan.

If you use HEN or a PEG, we may fund equipment for this including:

- enteral feeding tubes and pumps
- feed bags or bottles
- syringes and giving sets to get the formula into the feeding tube.

If we fund HEN products in your plan, we'll describe how much funding you have for this in your plan comments. The comment will appear in the Core - Consumables budget.

To include funding for nutrition supports, we need evidence from your dietitian or another suitably qualified health professional. Evidence could be your nutrition plan which shows how the supports will meet your individual nutrition needs. Your dietitian can also use our [Nutrition and dysphagia assistive technology assessment template](#) or write their own report.

Your nutrition supports will need to be regularly reviewed to make sure they continue to meet your individual nutrition needs. Your dietitian will recommend how often they will review your nutrition. For each review, we may fund a dietitian to reassess and update your nutrition plan.

We won't fund nutrition supports for health issues that are not related to your disability. This includes:

- weight loss
- eating disorders
- food allergies
- diabetes
- cardiovascular disease
- renal disease
- polycystic ovarian syndrome
- irritable bowel syndrome.

You can get support for these health issues through health and other systems.

## What if you need nutritional supplements or home enteral nutrition?

Food is an everyday cost which most Australians pay for, whether they have a disability or not.<sup>4</sup> However, your disability may mean you have trouble getting everything you need to stay healthy from food or drink.

To help you get the nutrition you need, you may be prescribed nutritional supplements that you eat or drink by a suitably qualified health professional. These supplements increase the amount of nutrition you get in your diet. We may be able to include funding for the prescribed nutritional supplements in your plan. The supplements need to be related to your disability.

You may use HEN instead of eating food and drink orally. This could be the only way you get the nutrition you need. Or you could also eat some of your food and drink orally. We may include funding for HEN formula in your plan. We may do this if you get all or part of your nutrition from HEN. Your dietitian and medical team will work out the best way for you to get the nutrition you need.

We'll use reports from a suitably qualified health professional to work out if nutritional supplements or HEN meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#) for you. A suitably qualified health professional will most likely be your dietitian. They can use our [Nutrition and dysphagia assistive technology assessment template](#) or write their own report.

You can learn more in our [Would we fund it guide – home enteral nutrition](#).

If you have trouble swallowing because of your disability, you may need thickener products. Thickener products thicken food or fluids to help you to swallow, eat and drink safely. A speech pathologist will recommend the type and amount of thickener you need.

## What if you need help to manage your nutrition?

Your disability may mean you need help to manage your nutrition. We may be able to fund this support. This generally can include a qualified dietitian to:

- create and review a nutritional meal plan for you
- train the people who support you in your nutrition support needs, such as a family member, carer, or support worker.

If you have a PEG, we may fund a registered nurse to help with the care of it and your HEN. We would need evidence that describes why you need a registered nurse and what they will do. Where we can, we'll generally fund a nurse to train a family member or a support worker in your individual nutrition support needs.

We may be able to fund a support worker if you have trouble looking after your PEG or HEN. The support worker can help with cleaning your PEG and the area where it enters your body.

We may also be able to fund a support worker to help with meal preparation if your disability means you can't do this yourself. Learn more in [What if you need help to prepare meals?](#)

We can only fund these supports if they meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#) for you.

## What if you need help to prepare meals?

Some people may need support to understand healthy eating or to prepare healthy food due to their disability. Some people may need support with both. This could be because of physical, cognitive, or psychosocial disability.

When we decide support for meal preparation meets the NDIS funding criteria, you can get this support in 2 different ways.

### Disability Support Worker

When you need a support worker to help you with your daily living tasks this might include meal planning, shopping, and meal preparation. This funding will be part of your core budget. We'll only include funding for a support worker in your plan if you can't do these tasks independently because of your disability and if it's not reasonable to expect friends and family to do this or they aren't able to.<sup>5</sup> A support worker can help you to build your skills so you can start to prepare more of your own meals.

### Prepared and delivered meals

You may need to access prepared and delivered meals for a limited time. You can use your funding for meal preparation supports flexibly to pay for a pre-prepared and delivered meal service. Learn more about using [your meal preparation supports flexibly](#).

For us to include funding in your plan for help to prepare meals it must meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#). Generally, we'll fund supports that will help you learn how to do these tasks yourself over time. However, we know some participants may always need help with meal preparation. Supports for meal preparation will not be reasonable and necessary for everyone though.

To work out how much meal preparation funding to include in your plan, we'll think about:

- what supports you currently have to prepare meals
- how much time a support worker would need to help you to prepare meals. If we include this support to help you become more independent, this will usually reduce over the length of your plan.
- whether you are expecting any changes where your friends, carers or current support workers will be unable to help prepare meals for a period of time
- what participants with a similar situation to you have in their plan.

We'll also think what programs are available in the community to help you prepare meals.

If other supports in your plan already help you with meals, we generally won't include funding for help with meal preparation. Other supports which help with your meals could be supported independent living, short or medium-term accommodation or daily assistance.

When we work out how much meal preparation funding to include in your plan, we won't include the cost of food or ingredients. Food is an everyday living cost for everybody, whether they have a disability or not.<sup>6</sup> You'll need to pay for the food yourself.

If we include meal preparation supports in your plan, you can choose which provider you want to help you learn how to prepare your meals. You can decide with them how they will provide the support. This funding is in your core budget and is flexible. This means that if you have a temporary change in circumstances and need to have meals prepared and delivered to you instead of using a support worker you can do this without the need for a change to your plan. Learn more about using [meal preparation supports flexibly](#).

### **How can I use my meal preparation support flexibly?**

You have some flexibility over how you spend your core supports budget and which providers you get your supports from. If we include meal preparation supports in your plan, we will specify this so you can see how much of your core supports you can use for meal preparation. We'll describe how much funding you have for this in your plan comments. Occasionally, you may have a short-term change in your situation, like needing to isolate, which means you need to get this support differently.

You may have funding in your core budget for a support worker to help you prepare meals or shop for groceries. If you do, you may decide to use this funding to have meals prepared and delivered for a limited time instead.

You'll need to think about the best way to use the funding in your plan. You need to spend your NDIS funding as described in your plan.<sup>7</sup> This means if we haven't specified meal preparation in your plan then you won't be able to purchase this support. If we include funding for meal preparation so you can build your skills in planning and preparing healthy meals, you will need to buy supports that help you do this. If you only buy meal delivery this won't help you build your skills. We'll talk to you about how your supports have helped you build your skills when we reassess your plan.

You can only use funding from your core budget for support with meal preparation if we agree it meets the [NDIS funding criteria](#) and we describe it in your plan. You may not have funding for meal preparation in your plan. If you don't and use your core funding for a support worker to help prepare meals or for meal delivery, it's likely you'll run out of funding. We won't add extra funding to your plan if this happens. To learn more about how to get the most out of your plan, go to [Our Guideline – Your Plan](#).

You may decide to use your support flexibly in different ways and have meals prepared and delivered to you, if:

- you are diagnosed with an infectious disease which means you need to isolate or reduce your contact with others.
- the people who usually support you to prepare meals are unavailable for a short period of time - for example, if family members who help you go into hospital.
- you have been recently discharged from hospital or are recovering from an illness and need temporary nutrition support while you arrange for help from support workers.
- you have been unable to find someone else to help you prepare meals during these periods.

We don't need a quote for you to use funding from your core budget like this. But you can't use your funding to cover the cost of food, only to have the meals prepared and delivered. Remember food is an everyday living cost for everybody, whether they have a disability or not, so we won't fund the cost of food or ingredients.<sup>8</sup> We can only fund the preparation and delivery supports you need due to your disability support needs.

Providers may ask you to pay for the food and ingredients before the meals are prepared and delivered. You can ask providers to separate the cost of food from the total cost when you discuss the total cost for meal preparation and delivery. If you use the funds in your core budget flexibly to purchase meal preparation and delivery, you can claim:

- 100 percent of the invoice if the provider has removed the cost of food
- 70 percent of the invoice if the provider includes the cost of food in the total cost.

If your plan is managed by us, you will only be able to use a registered provider to arrange a support worker to help you at home, or to have meals prepared and delivered. If your plan is self-managed or plan-managed, you can choose to use either a registered or unregistered provider to deliver this support.

When considering a provider, you should ask whether the meals provided are meeting the standards of the [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#).

To learn more, speak to your MyNDIS contact or support coordinator.

If your nutrition support needs change significantly, you should [contact us](#). Let us know about new reports or assessments you have. If we decide your plan isn't meeting your needs, we can do a plan reassessment.

Learn more about [changing your plan](#).

## How do you get nutrition supports in your plan?

### Do you need to give us evidence for nutrition supports?

Yes. To get nutrition supports in your plan, you need to give us evidence that helps us understand the disability related supports you need. Talk to your My NDIS contact or support coordinator to work out what evidence we need. Learn more about the [evidence we need before we create your plan](#).

You can give us any new information or evidence about your support needs when you get it or anytime we talk with you.

This could be a detailed report from your dietitian which includes any nutritional meal plans for you. Or it could be a report from another suitably qualified health professional which explains why you need a nutrition support.

Along with other evidence we will also ask you about your nutrition support needs. We'll want to know what supports you currently use and how often you use them. We'll also want to know who provides the supports. For example, family and friends, a support worker or dietitian. We may also ask if you are expecting any change in who provides your supports.

You can tell us about any disability-related nutrition supports you may need but are not using. For example, if you expect there will be a change in your carer arrangements.

We use all of this information to decide if nutrition supports meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#). If they do, we'll work out the amount of disability-related nutrition support to include in your plan.

Some supports you request may be better funded by another service system. Where we can, we will link you to other services for these supports, including the health system.

### What if you don't agree with our decision?

If we decide nutrition supports don't meet our [NDIS funding criteria](#), we can't include them in your plan. We'll explain our decision and give you written reasons why we made the decision.<sup>9</sup>

If you don't agree with a decision we make about nutrition supports, you can ask for an internal review of our decision.<sup>10</sup> You'll need to ask for an internal review within 3 months of getting your plan.<sup>11</sup> Learn more about [reviewing our decisions](#).

## What happens once you have nutrition supports in your plan?

Once you have nutrition support funding in your plan you can use it to get the nutrition products or help you need. Your plan will describe how you can use the funding in your plan comments. The comments will be next to the funding budget in your plan.

If you need help to use the funding, talk to your My NDIS contact or support coordinator. Learn more in [Our Guideline – Your Plan](#) or the general [Using Your Plan webpage](#). You can also go to [What happens once you have Disability-related health support funding in your plan?](#)

## Reference List

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- <sup>1</sup> NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules 2013 r 7.5(b).
- <sup>2</sup> NDIS Act 2013 s 34(1)(f).
- <sup>3</sup> NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 7.5(b).
- <sup>4</sup> NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 5.1(d).
- <sup>5</sup> NDIS Act 2013 s 34(1)(e).
- <sup>6</sup> NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 5.1(d).
- <sup>7</sup> NDIS Act 2013 s 46(1).
- <sup>8</sup> NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 5.1(d).
- <sup>9</sup> NDIS Act s100(1).
- <sup>10</sup> NDIS Act s100.
- <sup>11</sup> NDIS Act s100(2).