



# Nutrition-Related Challenges and Needs of Community-Dwelling Survivors of Traumatic Brain Injury: A Focus Group Study of the Perspectives of Caregivers



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## Background and Objective

It is well-documented that individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) have unique nutrition needs in the acute phase of the injury. However, little is known about long-term nutrition challenges faced by TBI survivors once they return home to live in the community.

**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to understand the nutrition-related challenges and needs of community-dwelling TBI survivors from the perspective of their family caregivers.

**Table: Participant Demographics**

Demographic	n	%
Gender		
Male	3	27.3
Female	8	72.7
Racial Background		
Black/African American	4	36.4
White/Caucasian	7	63.6
Marital Status		
Married	8	72.7
Divorced	3	27.3
Employment Status		
Employed Full-time	2	18.2
Homemaker	1	9.1
Retired	7	63.6
Disabled	1	9.1
Relationship to TBI survivor		
Parent	8	72.7
Spouse/Significant Other	2	18.2
Extended family – Aunt or Uncle	1	9.1
	<i>M ± SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Caregiver Age	60.7 ± 14	29-76
Years of caregiving for loved one	9.6 ± 8.3	0.5-20

M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

## Subjects and Methods

- 3 focus groups with 11 caregivers of community-dwelling TBI survivors in Alabama who receive services through the Alabama Head Injury Foundation
- Semi-structured focus group guide
- Sessions were audio recorded and transcribed
- Analyzed using the directed content analysis approach

## Results

Several nutrition-related challenges and needs were identified by caregivers. These themes are reflected in the following quotes.

### Nutrition-Related Challenges

Participant Quotes:

- ‘The challenge with [loved one with TBI] is ... he will **overeate** ... **everything that you put in front of him**. And ... and I have to kind of, uh, limit what I have put in front of him to eat.’
- ‘I think the **meal planning and weight management**, my daughter has been **gaining weight** since not getting out. She does not get out daily, you know, she is at home. So, she is uh, gaining pounds.’
- ‘My son does **not eat balanced meals**. He does not eat vegetables... he eats meat and potatoes, a lot of chicken and rice or French fries and a hamburger. He does not eat balanced food, meals at all... I worry about that.’
- ‘Just chips, cakes, cookies ... whatever he can get.’
- ‘Mine wants to do nothing but **eat junk** all the time.’
- ‘**Meal-planning**, that would be good, you know, kind of help you. And then ... I guess, determine the calorie intake of... different types of foods that ... you purchase ... on a regular basis. How to **plan a healthy meal**.’

## Results

### Nutrition-Related Needs

Participant Quotes:

- ‘We **have not had resources** and through the grace of God, we have not had the need to go through SNAP benefits - knock on wood - we have been able to get by on our own. It has been tighter than a mosquito's headband but we have gotten by.’
- ‘Yeah, you know, **Meals on Wheels**... I know my sister tried but it is such a long waiting line that they are not able to get back with you...’
- ‘There needs to be ... some help, you know, like, ... when he was getting that ... **little bit of money for food stamps**, you know, it just makes them feel good. When they can go do their own thing, and not have to rely on us for every little thing.’

## Conclusions/Significance

- Caregivers identified the need for nutritional guidance and access to food and nutrition programs due to limited resources.
- Our findings regarding weight gain and overeating are consistent with other studies, reflecting a common challenge faced by TBI survivors.
- These findings can inform nutrition interventions and programs to improve the health and nutritional status of community-dwelling individuals with TBI.

## Tips for Clinicians

- Assess food security and resources
- Assess weight status and chronic disease risk
- Teach families to plan healthy meals
- Provide weight management strategies