



**Case Study Name:** Liz and Pauline (her mum)

**Case Study Age:** Pauline is 76 years old

**Location:** Lytham St Anne's, Lancashire

Liz usually saw her mum, Pauline, once every couple of months. Liz lives 100 miles away from her parents, works full-time, as does her husband, and has a 19-month old son. More frequent visits were difficult to fit in. According to Liz's mum, around three years ago she started to experience difficulty in eating and keeping food down. However, arriving at her parents' house for a visit in the summer of this year, despite advance warning from her dad to "be prepared", Liz was shocked and moved to tears to see that her mum had lost an enormous amount of weight since she had last seen her and her "skin was hanging off her".

Liz spoke to her dad and impressed upon him that her mum needed professional help. Her mum had been to see a doctor who commented that she probably needed to lose some weight which might help with the other conditions she suffers from. Like many people of Liz's parents' generation, neither her mum nor dad wanted to "keep bothering" the doctor by going again and again. In the meantime, Liz felt that her mum was suffering from severe malnutrition and that nobody cared. Liz's dad, aged 78 this month, is carrying the huge burden of not only caring for his wife but also carrying out all of the jobs around the house and garden usually shared by a couple.

Liz started to visit her mum on a fortnightly basis because she was so worried about her deteriorating health. Her mum was too weak to do anything. She couldn't go out anywhere and spent days just sitting in a chair at home and had admitted to Liz that she "wished she could die" as there was no point to her life. Liz has been both heartbroken by her mum's condition and angry that no-one seemed to notice or care that here was an elderly lady, at one point having lost 2kg in one week, receiving little attention and no treatment for what was clearly malnutrition. Liz was afraid that if her mum wasn't referred to a dietitian as soon as possible, her life would be at risk.

At Liz's insistence, her mum did go back to her GP and was eventually diagnosed with malnutrition, referred and prescribed an oral nutritional supplement to try and help her gain weight.

Liz speaks to her mum every day now and since receiving help and treatment, her mum says she is feeling a little better. She has gained a small proportion of the weight she lost and her weight is stable. She is still not strong enough to go out or participate in any activity that needs any energy.

For anyone in a similar situation, Liz recommends that if you think an elderly relative has lost weight and is not eating properly, be persistent with the GP, ask for information as there are ways of treating malnutrition. Don't give up, this is treatable, especially if you can spot the signs early.

*Abbott Nutrition pledges to continue to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of malnutrition in older people through our I-CARE initiative, supported by the Patients Association.*

*The I-CARE checklist provides families and carers with an easy checklist of signs to be vigilant about: I – I will check **C**lothing, **A**ppetite, **R**ings, **E**nergy levels and encourage the individual at risk to seek medical advice.*