Malnutrition is very common in elderly people, predominantly in the frail or sick. Poor nutritional status appears to be a major contributing factor of poor prognosis in these individuals. Nutrition assessment must be part of the comprehensive geriatric assessment, and can help guide the clinician towards appropriate nutrition intervention, which should then be followed closely. The MNA® (Mini Nutritional Assessment) has been developed, validated and is very widely used around the world. It helps healthcare professionals (physicians, dietitians, nurses, etc.) assess the nutritional status of the elderly and guides them towards intervention. In the last 15 years there have been more than 200 publications on the MNA® which show the use of the MNA® in many different settings (acute, sub-acute, long-term care units, nursing home, home care) and in numerous countries and varied cultures. It has also been translated into more than 20 languages.

It is interesting to point out that the BMI alone does not identify undernutrition in the obese elderly person and may falsely identify thin people as malnourished. Plasma albumin, as a nutritional parameter, is difficult to use in people with inflammation or dehydration; two very frequent conditions in the frail elderly. Composite tools like the MNA® can not only identify those at risk of undernutrition, but can also provide very useful information for intervention by noting the factors (specific questions on the MNA® form) contributing to the patient’s altered nutritional status. This information provides the clinician with a starting point for intervention to maximize nutritional status.

We are very happy to publish in this issue of the JNHA important papers discussing different aspects of the MNA®: The MNA®, its history and challenges (1), a review of MNA® literature (2), the MNA® compared to other nutrition screening tools(3), the use of the MNA® in dental clinics (4), the usefulness of the MNA® in Long-term care and Acute care in the US (5), screening for malnutrition in obese elderly persons (6), the use of the MNA® in different populations and cultures (7). These papers were recently presented at an IANA (International Academy on Nutrition and Aging) workshop, hosted in Chicago, in May 2006. We thank the Nestlé Nutrition Institute for their educational support of this workshop.

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