FAQ - Outpatient Referrals for Nutrition Services

* **Why refer patients?** Research demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of **Medical Nutrition Therapy** (**MNT)**. MNT is defined as nutritional diagnostic, therapy and counseling services for the purpose of disease management which are furnished by a registered dietitian. Medical nutrition therapy saves money by providing alternatives to more costly therapy therapies, by decreasing length of hospital stay and by preventing the need for surgery and hospitalizations. Registered Dietitians, the nutrition experts, can translate the science of nutrition into practical solutions to help individuals make positive lifestyle changes.
* **How do I refer a patient?** You can fax a referral form [(205) 939-6047] or call the Department of Clinical Nutrition and Lactation Services of Children’s Health System at (205) 939-9204.
* **What information is required to refer a patient?** We must have a physician’s signature authorizing the visit, patient diagnosis and reason for the referral. We ask for a copy of the patient’s growth chart, their most recent clinic visit and any other pertinent data. Once we receive a referral, we will contact the patient’s family to schedule an appointment. If you would like to be notified of the date/time of the appointment, just let us know.
* **How do I get an appointment for my patient?** Once we receive a referral, we will contact the patient’s family to schedule an appointment. If you would like to be notified of the date/time of the appointment, just let us know.
* **How long does it take to get an appointment?** Appointments are scheduled Monday – Friday during regular business hours. Appointments are scheduled with consideration given to the parents’ preferences.
* **Is there a charge? Does insurance cover MNT?** Yes. Insurance companies are billed for medical nutrition therapy using the CPT codes for this service which are included in the American Medical Association’s Current Procedural Terminology (CPT). Insurance companies have paid in part, but due to the number of different plans and types of insurance, it is best for parents/guardians to check with their health insurance company about the benefits of their plan. The business office can assist families with payment plans.
* **What does the visit include?** The evidence-based pediatric nutrition practice of MNT can be summarized in two words: assessment and intervention. Once the RD makes a MNT nutrition diagnosis from analysis of assessment data, the RD and client determine goals, care plan, interventions and a plan for follow-up over multiple visits to assist with behavior/lifestyle changes relative to the nutrition problem and medical condition/disease(s). Monitoring of growth, goals for food intake, clinical and behavioral outcomes (planned goals) is included. Recommendations for lab monitoring may also be recommended.
* **Is there follow up?** We encourage at least one follow up visit. You can indicate on the referral form, the number of follow up visits or the duration of follow up that you require.
* **Will I get a report on my patient?** Yes. If your patient refuses services or does not show for their appointment without rescheduling, we will notify you using the original referral form as a communication tool. After your patient has been seen, you will receive via fax a copy of the patient’s assessment and care plan.
* **What if my patient doesn’t have a medical diagnosis?** Families who are concerned about their child’s health and want to learn about developing healthy eating and activity habits can benefit from MNT. Without a medical diagnosis, the visit would be self-pay since diagnosis codes are required on all claims submitted to third party payers.
* **Where do they go?** Outpatients for medical nutrition therapy are seen in Birmingham at Children’s South and the main campus in Park Place North, and in Huntsville at the North Alabama Children’s Specialists clinic. Lactation Services are located on the ground floor of the hospital building on the main campus. Free parking is available.
* **What do parents/patients need to bring?** We ask parents to bring a completed nutrition history form and 3 days of food/intake records. If they have specific questions, we ask them to bring those as well. The child must accompany the guardian. Older children participate in the education, goal setting and contracting is essential to their success.
* **What are common problems that you receive referrals for?** Overweight, failure to thrive, food allergies, lipid disorders are among the most common.