

Eat Well to Heal Well

How does eating affect your recovery after surgery?

Shortly you will be having surgery. Naturally your surgeon and all those involved in looking after you throughout your surgery will be doing all they can to ensure you make a speedy and healthy recovery. To help make your recovery from surgery as smooth as possible, it will help to be in great condition nutritionally. Good nutrition helps your wounds heal quickly which means you feel better sooner.

This advice is intended for the weeks leading up to your surgery. It may also be useful once discharged from hospital for about the six weeks it takes you to fully recover. This is not designed to replace other dietary advice you receive from the surgeon following your surgery.

Which are the most important nutrients for wound healing?

Nutrient Good food sources

Protein	Fish, Chicken, Meat, Cheese, Nuts, Milk, Eggs, Tofu, Soy milk, Legumes (baked beans, chick peas etc.), Sprouted grains
Zinc	Oysters, Beef, Lamb, Brazil nuts, Peanuts, Almonds, Wholegrains, Chicken
Selenium	Foods made with wholemeal flour, Meat, Chicken, Fish, Dairy, Soy
Iron	Liver, Kidneys, Oysters, Chicken, Almonds, Brazil nuts, Peanuts, Red meats, Black strap molasses, Dark green leafy vegetables
Copper	Liver, Kidneys, Shell fish, Wholegrains, Cherries, Dried Legumes (chick peas, baked beans etc.)
Silicon	Unrefined grains, Plant foods (vegetables, grains, fruits)
Manganese	Wheat bran, Legumes (kidney beans, chickpeas, baked beans) Nuts, Lettuce
Vitamin A	Liver, Kumara, Carrots, Spinach
Vitamin B5	Egg yolk, Liver, Kidneys, Yeast
Vitamin C	Blackcurrants, Strawberries, Kiwifruit, Oranges, Broccoli, Brussel sprouts
Omega 3 fats	Oily fish (salmon, Sardines, Tuna), Linseed / Flaxseed (whole, ground or oil)

More on protein

Both before and after surgery it is important to eat enough protein. Protein is probably the most important of all nutrients for surgery.

How much protein you need depends on how well nourished you are and how trouble free your recovery is following surgery.

Generally, you are well nourished if your weight is stable in the time leading up to surgery, you have been eating normally and feel able to do your usual physical activities.

You may be malnourished if you have lost weight without trying and have lost body fat and some of your muscle and strength too.

If you are well nourished and have a straight forward recovery then your daily need for protein is about 1g per Kg body weight. For a 60 Kg well nourished person this equals 60 g protein per day. Most people easily eat 60 g protein in one day.

If you are malnourished before surgery and/ or have a delay in recovering from surgery it usually means your need for protein is higher, about 1.5 g per Kg body weight.

So for a 60 Kg malnourished person this equals 90 g protein per day. To eat this much protein most people need to include protein rich foods for each of their 3 main meals and their 2-3 in between meal snacks.

Below is a list of protein rich foods which all provide 15 g of protein.

From the information above you can estimate very roughly your protein needs for this time around your surgery. Divide the daily amount by 15 to give you the number of protein portions you want to try to eat each day.

Using the examples above it works out like this. The well nourished 60 Kg person will try to eat 4 portions per day and the malnourished person will aim for 6 portions per day in the build up to surgery and ideally for about six weeks after surgery until recovered.

15 g protein portions

Red meat	50g lean cooked meat 75 g cooked mince 1 hamburger pattie 1 thick slice of ham	Nuts	½ cup almonds or cashew nuts 1 cup brazil nuts 3 Tbs pumpkin seeds
Chicken	60 g skinned chicken	Beans	1 cup Kidney beans
Eggs	2 large eggs		½ cup hummus
Breads	6 slices wholemeal bread	Cereal	1 cup muesli
Fish	1 fillet of fish 75 g canned salmon (1/3 tin) 75 g sardines (1/2 tin) 50 g tuna (1/3 tin) 7 oysters	Milk	400 ml milk 100 g cottage cheese 60 g hard cheese 300 ml yoghurt (2 pottles) 450 ml soy milk
Protein powders e.g. Metapro	1 ½ scoops (½ serving size)		

How can you put these ideas into your daily diet?

Try to eat regularly and if you prefer, have small meals and some snacks in between.

You will have realised by now that no one food provides all the magic nutrients. Ideally you want to try and eat a variety of foods including meat, chicken, fish, dairy, soy, nuts, seeds, vegetables, fruits and whole grains into your diet.

Remember the 5+ a day of vegetables and fruit still applies here.

If you are on a special diet, this advice is not intended to replace that but where possible do enjoy these foods too.

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Breakfast

Muesli with milk or soy milk served with fruit and yoghurt
Porridge with a tablespoon each of ground almonds and ground linseed (from health shops)
Wholegrain soy and linseed toast with peanut butter, eggs or avocado and cottage cheese

Mid Morning

Smoothie made with fruit, yoghurt and milk or soy milk

Lunch

Vegetable and lentil soup or Vegetable soup made with a soup mix (contains legumes)
Wholegrain bread sandwich filled with a can of tuna, lettuce, grated carrot, tomato and gherkin

Snack

Nuts and raisins or
Peanut butter sandwich or
Rice crackers and hummus

Dinner

*Liver and gravy, mashed potato and vegetables
Crumbed and herbed fish baked and served with vegetables and potatoes or
Chicken vegetables and noodle stir fry or
Beef casserole with vegetables and rice
Fruit and custard or rice pudding

Snack

Milky Milo
Crackers and cheese

Drinks

Remember to drink enough each day to keep well hydrated.
Enjoy plenty of water, herb tea, fruit teas and soups. If you don't like water enjoy it lightly flavoured with lime cordial or concentrate. Try to drink about 8 glasses of water each day.
Coffee, tea and alcohol do not hydrate you so well. If you enjoy these, remember to match each one with a glass of water too.

*Liver is not recommended if you are pregnant

Do you need supplements to help you heal well?

In an ideal world you would gain all the necessary nutrients from the food you eat. However it is difficult to eat a diet which achieves this and for many people in the lead up to surgery their diet becomes more limited than usual.
Certainly at times of stress such as when undergoing surgery, optimal nutrition is best achieved by eating as healthy diet as possible and taking an additional supplement(s).

Multivitamin mineral supplements

Leading up to and after surgery, until fully healed, your body needs extra vitamins and minerals.
If you wish to take a good quality supplement, try Solgar VM2000 or Blackmores Multiplus once daily, available from health shops.
If you have trouble swallowing capsules, try a liquid version such as Vidaylin and take 2 tsp per day, available from pharmacies.

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Protein supplements

If you find it difficult to eat enough protein rich food, you may find it easier to top up with a supplement of protein powder. Below are two examples. Most are based on milk powder but you can buy a soy based protein powder (Solgar) from the Herbal dispensary.

Metapro from Gymeez and other fitness shops. 3 scoops makes one drink and provides 25g protein.

Resource instant protein powder, 1 scoop per drink available from Healthworks pharmacy.

Total meal replacements

If you have difficulty eating your usual amount of food and / or eat a very limited number of foods, you may wish to use a liquid meal replacement. Most of these are based on milk and are available in supermarkets, pharmacies and fitness shops. Try Complan or Vitaplan instead of meals or as a nutritious high protein snack in between meals.

Arginaid and Cubitan

If after surgery your wounds are not healing as quickly as hoped, your surgeon may advise you to take Arginaid or Cubitan drinks. These provide additional nutrients to help you heal.

Last reviewed April 2015

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