

Eating Well for Wound Healing

How Does Good Nutrition Help With Wound Healing?

Eating well during wound healing can help your body heal faster and fight infection. To heal, you need more calories and more nutrients like protein, fluids, vitamin A, vitamin C, and zinc. Wounds heal faster when you get enough of the right foods.

If you have diabetes, kidney disease, or if you need to limit your fluids, talk to your doctor or dietitian before following the tips in this handout.

What Should I Eat?

In general, your body needs more calories (energy from food) while your wounds heal. Each day, try to eat foods from a variety of sources, especially from the following:

Protein

Prioritize protein! Protein provides the building blocks for muscle and skin repair; and you need more protein for wound healing. It also helps to boost immunity. Eat 3 to 4 servings per day. (One serving is 3-4 oz) Good sources include:

- Lean animal meat such as chicken, turkey, fish
- Beans, peas, lentils or tofu
- Nuts, peanut butter, or seeds
- Cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese or eggs
- Milk or a milk alternative like fortified soy

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates supply the energy your body needs to heal. Choose whole grains over refined grains. Some examples include:

- Whole grain breads and cereals
- Potatoes, rice or pasta
- A variety of fruits and vegetables
- Avoid refined and added sugars—these can promote bacteria growth

Fluid

Fluid is critical to wound healing, and you need more than usual. Water replaces fluid lost due to draining wounds. Drink half of your body weight in ounces, unless your doctor advises you otherwise. Example, if you weigh 150 lbs, drink 75 oz/day. Fluids can include:

- Water
- Milk or fortified soy beverage
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice
- Soup
- Coffee or tea

Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamin A, vitamin C, and zinc help your body to repair tissue damage, fight infections and keep your skin healthy. Try these foods:

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is found in animal foods and some brightly colored vegetables and fruits.

- Apricots
- Leafy greens
- Cantaloupe
- Carrots
- Milk
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Liver
- Mango
- Pumpkin

Vitamin C

Many vegetables and fruits are high in vitamin C. Eat bright red, orange and green veggies and fruits.

- Broccoli
- Citrus fruits
- Cantaloupe
- Kiwi
- Strawberries
- Bell Pepper
- Tomatoes
- Potato with skin

Zinc

Zinc is a mineral that is found mainly in animal foods.

- Eggs
- Fish
- Beans and lentils
- Liver
- Meat and poultry
- Seafood
- Whole grains
- Potato with skin

Am I Eating Enough?

Some people have trouble eating enough at meals to promote wound healing. Here are some ideas that may help:

Eat smaller meals more often. It may be easier to eat 6 small meals per day rather than 3 large ones. Consider having something to drink *after* your meals instead of before. This may help keep you from getting full too soon.

Eat healthy snacks. Snack in between meals on healthy foods such as:

- Cheese and crackers
- Cottage cheese and fruit
- Mixed nuts or trail mix
- Half a sandwich and a small piece of fruit
- Peanut butter and sliced apples
- Granola bars and fresh fruit

Ask your doctor or dietitian if you should take a nutritional supplement.

If you're still having trouble getting the protein or calories you need to help you heal, talk with your healthcare provider about a nutritional supplement.

Diabetes and Wound Healing

Good blood sugar control is very important during wound healing. This helps you heal faster and reduces risk of infection. Chronically high blood sugars can lead to poor blood circulation, thus increasing wound healing time. Please ask your dietitian for tips on managing blood sugars.

What Else Can I Do To Help My Wound Heal?

If you use tobacco, quit. Nicotine can reduce blood and oxygen flow to your tissues which can increase healing time.