

Eating Well for Wound Healing

How does good nutrition help wound healing?

Eating well during wound healing helps you heal faster and helps fight infection. During healing your body needs more of some nutrients such as calories, protein, and fluid. Other nutrients like vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, and zinc help keep your skin healthy.

The **best** source of these nutrients is food. If you are not eating enough healthy food, you may need to take a supplement. Ask your healthcare provider about taking a nutrition supplement drink and/or a multi-vitamin pill. If you have diabetes, kidney disease, or if you need to limit your fluids, talk to your dietitian before following the tips in this handout.

Eat a balanced diet

Use Canada's Food Guide to eat a variety of foods every day. Choose foods from at least three of the four food groups at each meal. Eat foods from one or two of the food groups as snacks.

The food groups of Canada's Food Guide are:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Grain Products
- Milk and Alternatives
- Meat and Alternatives

Calories

Your body needs extra calories while your wound heals. It is important to eat enough calories so you don't lose weight. If your appetite is poor, it may help to eat smaller meals more often, and eat snacks between meals.

Ask your dietitian for easy, high-calorie meal and snack ideas if you feel you are not eating enough food or are losing weight without trying.

Protein

You need more protein for wound healing. Try to eat a high protein food at each meal and at least one snack during the day. Choose these high-protein foods:

- cheese
- cottage cheese
- eggs
- fish
- fortified soy beverage
- legumes (beans, lentils)
- meat
- milk
- nuts and seeds
- peanut butter
- poultry
- tofu
- yogurt

Fluid

Your body needs more fluid to keep the skin healthy for wound healing. Water is the best source of fluid. You should plan drinks into your day, as your body may not always tell you when it is thirsty. Try to drink 9 to 12 cups (2.25 to 3 litres) of fluid each day.

Some examples of fluids are:

- 100 % pure fruit juice
- coffee or tea
- milk
- soup
- water
- vegetable juice

When you have a poor appetite, choose milk and juice more often.

Below are some tips to make sure you drink enough fluid during the day:

- ✓ Drink 1 to 2 cups (250 to 500 mL) of fluid at each meal.
- ✓ Keep a glass of water or water bottle near you all day. Wash your water bottle in warm soapy water after each use.

Vitamins and Minerals

There are a few vitamins and minerals that are important in wound healing:

- iron
- vitamin A
- vitamin C
- zinc

Together, these nutrients help your body to repair tissue damage, to fight infections, and to keep your skin healthy. Try to eat more foods from the lists below.

Vitamin A

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

Foods high in vitamin A:

- apricots
- asparagus
- cantaloupe
- carrots
- cheese
- eggs
- fish
- leafy greens
- liver
- mandarins
- mangoes
- milk
- papayas
- prunes
- pumpkin
- snap beans
- tangerines
- tomato sauce

Vitamin C

Vegetables and fruits are high in vitamin C. Eat more bright orange, red, and green vegetables and fruits.

Foods high in vitamin C:

- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- cantaloupe
- citrus fruits (oranges)
- kiwis
- papaya
- potatoes
- strawberries
- sweet peppers
- tomatoes
- 100% pure fruit juice

Iron

Iron is found in both animal and plant foods. Your body can use the iron found in animal foods more easily than from plant foods.

You can get the iron from your food more easily by eating a vitamin C-rich food at the same time. For example, eat an orange after enjoying lentil soup.

Foods high in iron:

- avocados
- blackstrap molasses
- dried fruit like raisins
- eggs
- fish
- iron-fortified cereal
- leafy greens (spinach, beet greens, Swiss chard)
- legumes (beans, lentils)
- meat
- nuts
- potato with skin
- poultry
- seafood (clams, oysters)
- tofu

Zinc

Zinc is a mineral that is found mostly in foods from animal sources.

Foods high in zinc:

- eggs
- fish
- legumes (beans, lentils)
- liver
- meat
- milk
- poultry
- seafood (oysters, crab, clams)
- whole grain foods (brown rice, cereals, oatmeal, barley)

Diabetes and Wound Healing

Good blood sugar control is very important during wound healing. This helps you heal faster and reduces the risk of wound infection. Please ask your dietitian for tips on managing your blood sugar.

Remember:

Eat a wide variety of foods every day to get the **calories, protein, fluid, vitamins, and minerals** you need to heal your skin and keep it healthy.