

Nutrition & Wellness

Patient Education Resource

Good nutrition plays a vital role in your recovery from surgery and overall cancer treatment. What you eat and drink can directly affect your healing, energy level, and immune function. This guide provides practical tips to support your body before and after surgery.

1. Eating Before Surgery

The weeks before surgery are an opportunity to build your nutritional reserves:

- Eat a balanced diet rich in **lean protein** (chicken, fish, eggs, beans, Greek yogurt) to support tissue repair
- Include **fruits and vegetables** daily — they provide vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support immune function
- Choose **whole grains** (brown rice, oatmeal, whole wheat bread) for sustained energy
- If your appetite is poor, try small, frequent meals (5–6 per day) rather than three large ones
- Consider a **protein supplement or nutritional shake** if you are losing weight unintentionally — discuss with your care team
- Avoid excessive alcohol; it impairs immune function and wound healing

2. Eating After Surgery

Your appetite may be reduced after surgery. This is normal. Focus on small, nutrient-dense meals:

- **Start slowly:** You will typically begin with clear liquids in the hospital, then advance to soft foods as tolerated
- **Prioritize protein:** Aim for protein at every meal and snack — it is essential for wound healing. Good sources: scrambled eggs, cottage cheese, yogurt, smooth nut butters, protein shakes
- **Eat small and often:** 5–6 small meals/snacks per day are easier to tolerate than 3 large meals
- **Avoid foods that may cause discomfort:** Fried, greasy, or very spicy foods; raw vegetables and high-fiber foods may need to be reintroduced gradually
- **Chew thoroughly** and eat slowly to aid digestion
- If you had bowel surgery, your surgeon may provide a specific diet progression — follow it closely

3. Hydration

- Aim for **8–10 cups (64–80 oz) of fluid per day** unless your doctor advises otherwise
- Water is best; you can also count broth, herbal tea, and diluted juices

- Avoid large amounts of caffeinated or sugary beverages
- If you have an ostomy, you may need more fluids — discuss targets with your care team
- Signs of dehydration to watch for: dark urine, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, low urine output
- Sip fluids throughout the day rather than drinking large amounts at once

4. Recommended Foods for Healing

High-Protein Foods:

Eggs, chicken, turkey, fish, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu, lentils, beans, protein shakes

Vitamin C (supports wound healing):

Oranges, strawberries, bell peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, kiwi

Vitamin A (supports immune function):

Sweet potatoes, carrots, spinach, cantaloupe, mangoes

Zinc (supports tissue repair):

Lean red meat, poultry, pumpkin seeds, chickpeas, fortified cereals

Iron (supports blood cell production):

Lean red meat, spinach, lentils, fortified cereals, beans (pair with vitamin C for better absorption)

Healthy Fats:

Avocado, olive oil, nuts, seeds, salmon — support calorie needs and anti-inflammatory processes

5. Supplements to Avoid

Some supplements can interfere with surgery, anesthesia, or cancer treatment. **Always check with your surgical team before taking any supplement.**

- **Fish oil / omega-3 capsules:** Can increase bleeding risk — stop 7–10 days before surgery
- **Vitamin E (high-dose):** May increase bleeding — stop 7–10 days before surgery
- **Garlic supplements:** Can thin the blood and interact with anesthesia
- **Ginkgo biloba:** Increases bleeding risk
- **St. John's Wort:** Interacts with many medications including anesthetics and chemotherapy drugs
- **Turmeric / curcumin (high-dose):** May affect blood clotting and interact with chemotherapy
- **Green tea extract (concentrated):** May interact with certain chemotherapy agents

A standard daily multivitamin is generally safe — but confirm with your care team.

6. Tips for Supporting Healing

- Keep a food diary for the first few weeks to track what you tolerate well
- If you experience nausea, try bland foods (toast, rice, bananas, applesauce) and ginger tea
- Walk regularly — gentle activity improves appetite and digestion
- Get adequate sleep — your body heals most effectively during rest
- Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian if you are struggling with weight loss, poor appetite, or dietary restrictions
- Stay connected with your care team about nutritional concerns at every follow-up visit

This resource is for educational purposes only and does not replace individualized medical advice. Always discuss dietary changes and supplement use with your care team.