

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Nutrition for Wound Healing

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, or your weight is reducing unintentionally, despite making changes from the information below, please contact your GP who may consider referring you to a dietitian.

Good nutrition is essential for optimal wound healing. Your diet can affect how fast your body heals, how strong your tissue becomes, and your resistance to infection during the healing process. A poor nutritional intake can impair healing and result in chronic wounds which take much longer to repair and are more likely to become infected.

Energy (calories)

If you eat an inadequate amount of energy during the healing process, your body will start to break down its own stores – including muscles – to replenish the damaged tissue.

How do I ensure that my energy intake is adequate?

- If you are maintaining a healthy weight your energy intake is likely to be adequate
- If you have a low body weight, or are losing weight unintentionally then you may benefit from increasing your energy intake

You may need more calories to maintain or increase your weight when your body is healing. This could include:

- Eating extra snacks between meals
- Having nourishing drinks such as milk or milk alternatives
- Choosing higher energy foods (avoid 'diet' or 'light' options)

Protein

Protein is necessary for the growth and repair of all tissues including muscle and skin.

The exact amount of protein needed by an individual will depend on a person's age, weight, current nutritional status, and the size and severity of any damage to body tissue. Most people should aim for 2-3 servings of protein per day from varied sources. You could try:

- Including lean meat in your evening meal or as a sandwich filling
- Adding beans or pulses to casseroles, soups and salads or as a side serving
- Having fish twice per week, with at least one source to be oily fish
- Having nuts or seeds as a snack between meals or scatter over cereal or salad
- Adding an egg to salads, sandwiches or have on toast for breakfast
- Adding dairy foods (or non-dairy alternatives) into your meals – have yoghurt for dessert or with your lunch or a milky drink before bed
- Using vegetarian alternative protein such as tofu, soya or Quorn as a base for meals

Micronutrients – vitamins and minerals

Almost all vitamins and minerals have some role to play within the repair of tissue although some are more important than others. The best way to ensure that you're getting enough of the full range of micronutrients is to make your diet as varied as possible and try to include the following dietary principles:

Eat a minimum of 5-a-day

Each fruit and vegetable will have a different balance of vitamins and minerals so try to include as wide a range as possible and aim to have at least 5 portions each day. Ways to increase your intake of fruit and vegetables may include:

- Having a 150ml glass of fruit or vegetable juice with a meal
- Having fresh, tinned, or dried fruit on breakfast cereal or with yoghurt as a pudding
- Chopping extra vegetables into pasta sauces, stews, or casseroles
- Adding grated carrot, sliced tomato, or cucumber to sandwiches
- Having chopped vegetables as a savoury snack with a dip
- Creating your own pizza topping using vegetables

Base meals around starchy carbohydrates

Starchy carbohydrates include foods such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, cereals, grains and crackers. As well as being the body's preferred source of energy, carbohydrates provide us with essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre. Aim to include a portion of starchy carbohydrate at every meal – using wholegrain options where possible. Examples include:

- Granary or wholemeal bread
- Wholegrain pasta
- Brown rice, bulgar wheat or quinoa
- Wholegrain cereals such as porridge oats, wheat biscuits or wheat pillows

Fluids

Dehydration is known to affect wound healing. Some wounds may produce exudate (fluid secreted by body tissue) leading to an increased requirement of fluid to replace the losses. To maintain good hydration aim to:

- Drink at least 6-8 cups or glasses of fluid each day (includes hot drinks such as tea, coffee and hot chocolate, squash, fruit juices, milk, soups, jelly and other liquids)
- Reduce caffeinated drinks if you consume more than 3 cups per day (more than this may start to have a dehydrating affect)
- Stay within recommended limits for alcohol consumption (no more than 14 units per week)

An indicator of good hydration is urine which is pale in colour. Dark or strong-smelling urine is likely to indicate dehydration.

