

Nutrition for Wound Healing

Why does it matter what I eat when I have a wound?

Having a wound puts extra demands on your body. To heal, you need more calories and more nutrients. Wounds heal faster if you get enough of the right foods — and if you don't, they heal more slowly. Follow the guidelines below to promote wound healing.

What should I eat?

Every day, try to eat foods from a variety of sources that include the following:

- **Protein.** Protein provides the building material for muscle and skin repair. It also helps boost immunity. **Eat 3 to 4 servings per day.** (One serving is 3 to 4 ounces.) Good sources of protein include:
 - Lean animal meat such as beef, pork, chicken, or fish
 - Dried beans, peas, lentils, or tofu
 - Nuts, peanut butter, or seeds
 - Cheese, yogurt, or eggs
- **Carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates supply the energy your body needs to heal. Good choices include:
 - Whole grain breads and cereals
 - Potatoes, rice, or pasta
 - A variety of fruits and vegetables
 - Foods with vitamin A such as bright orange fruits and vegetables, and dark green leafy vegetables
 - Foods with vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, cantaloupe, and broccoli

If you have diabetes, carefully follow the diet and medication recommendations for your diabetes. If your wounds are not healing, follow up with your dietitian or other healthcare provider.



Good nutrition helps your wounds heal faster.

- **Milk and dairy products.** These are good sources of both carbohydrates and protein. Unless your doctor says not to eat dairy, be sure to include at least 3 servings per day. One serving of milk or yogurt is one cup. Soy milk can be substituted for regular milk. Be mindful of other dairy alternatives, such as rice, almond, oat, or coconut milk, as they tend to have less protein than regular milk.
- **Water.** Water is critical to wound healing — and you need more than usual. Water replaces fluid lost with draining wounds. Drink about 6 to 8 cups per day, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

What about vitamins and minerals?

You can get most of the vitamins and minerals you need from eating a well-balanced diet, as described above. Be sure to eat at least one serving per day of red meats, fortified cereals, or dark green leafy vegetables.

If you're not eating at least 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables, your doctor or dietitian may recommend a daily multi-vitamin. Only take other vitamins or minerals if recommended by a healthcare provider.

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 larger meals. Consider having something to drink after you eat instead of before. This may keep you from getting full too soon.
- **Eat healthy snacks.** You can help get the nutrition you need by snacking 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 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 doctor about a nutritional supplement.

If you need further help getting enough calories, protein, or vitamins and minerals, contact a dietitian. Your healthcare providers can help you find one.

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.

Special instructions

Some people need to follow special diets for specific medical conditions. For example, if you have kidney or heart issues, check with your doctor or dietitian before adding too much protein. Ask about good food choices for you.

Special instructions from your healthcare providers:

To contact your healthcare provider, call:

When should I call my doctor?

Contact your healthcare provider if:

- Your wound is not healing
- You don't feel like eating
- You are losing weight

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