Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Nutrition To Help Heal Your Wounds After Surgery

This information explains the nutrients you need to help heal your wounds after surgery.

Your skin helps protect your body from infection. When your skin is cut or broken, you may be at risk for infection. The faster your wounds heal, the less chance of getting an infection.

How to get nutrients before and after your surgery

Eating a balanced diet before and after surgery can give your body the nutrients it needs to heal. Read the "Nutrients that help your wounds heal" section of this resource for examples of important nutrients and their food sources.

Talk with your healthcare provider

Talk with your healthcare provider first If you're thinking about taking vitamins, minerals, or other dietary supplements.

If you have a health condition, such as diabetes, kidney disease, or high cholesterol, your healthcare provider can tell you which diet is best for you.

Nutrients that help your wounds heal

Here is a list of nutrients, what they do, and their food sources:

Protein helps your body build tissue. Sources of protein include:

- Chicken
- Beef
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lentils, beans, chickpeas
- Nuts and seeds
- Tofu
- Quinoa
- Cheese
- Yogurt
- Milk or soymilk

Magnesium is a mineral that helps heal broken tissue and reduce swelling. Sources of magnesium include:

- Avocado
- Almonds
- Cashews
- Leafy greens (such as kale, spinach, and collards)
- Bananas
- Tofu
- Whole grains (such as oats and brown rice)

Zinc is a mineral that helps your skin heal and grow. Sources of zinc include:

- Fish and seafood (such as oysters, clams, crab, and halibut)
- Meats and poultry (such as beef, chicken, and turkey)
- Yogurt
- Eggs

- Spinach
- Nuts and seeds (such as pumpkin seeds and cashews)
- Whole grains (such as oats and quinoa)
- Lentils, beans, chickpeas

Vitamin A helps your body make more skin cells. Sources of vitamin A include:

- Sweet potatoes
- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Eggs
- Bell peppers (mainly red peppers)
- Mango
- Melons (such as cantaloupe and watermelon)
- Avocado
- Leafy greens (such as collards, turnip greens, and spinach)
- Butternut squash
- Milk
- Tomatoes

How to control your blood sugar

Controlling your blood sugar is important to help your wounds heal. High blood sugar can cause poor blood flow and nerve issues and make it harder to fight infection. This can make your wounds heal more slowly or not at all. You can manage your blood sugar level by:

- Tracking your blood sugar if you have diabetes (high blood sugar).
- Taking your diabetes medicine or insulin as prescribed by your healthcare provider.

- Following a healthy diet and making sure to stay on your meal plan.
- Limiting sweet foods and drinks.
- Increasing your physical activity to the level your healthcare provider recommends.

Tips for getting enough nutrients

You may need more protein and calories than usual while your wounds heal and you recover from surgery. But, you may feel less hungry after surgery due to:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual)
- Pain

The following tips can help you get enough protein and calories:

- Eat small amounts at a time, but eat more often.
- Eat every few hours. Don't wait until you feel hungry.
- Serve smaller food portions if larger portions feel overwhelming.
- Include a source of protein at each meal or snack.
- Stay hydrated (get enough fluids) with water or other unsweetened drinks. Talk with your clinical dietitian nutritionist about how much fluid you should drink.
- Try nutrition supplement drinks, bars, and shakes. They're a great way to get more protein and calories between meals. To learn more, read *Eating Well During Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eating-cancer-treatment)

To schedule an appointment with a clinical dietitian nutritionist at any of our locations, or by video visit or phone, call 212-639-7312.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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