

# Nutrition

## Recovery After Surgery

You need calories and nutrients to help you heal properly and as quickly as possible. Here are some tips:

- Protein rich foods help build and repair body tissue, and build and maintain muscles. Women and seniors especially don't get enough protein. Ensure you have 2-3 servings a day of these foods – meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy, legumes, and nuts.
- Calcium can help bones renew, slow bone loss and lower the risk of fracture. Consume 2-4 servings a day. One serving equals 1 cup of milk, 2 ounces of cheese, or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of yogurt. Products should contain vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium.
- Vitamin C helps to promote healing. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- You may be constipated due to pain medications and moving less. Eat plenty of fibre like grains and bran and drink lots of water.
- If your appetite is limited, you can still increase calories. Eat small meals more often. Drink nutritious liquids like milk, juice and milkshakes, or add fats (e.g. cream, margarine, butter, oil, mayonnaise, salad dressing) and sweets (e.g. jams, honey, syrup, sugar) to foods.
- Consider nutritional supplements (like Ensure™ and Boost™) if you're struggling to eat a well-balanced diet.

## Canada's Food Guide

How much food do you need, and what's best for you? *Canada's Food Guide* helps you make healthy choices. Check the guide at Health Canada's website, <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

### *Vegetables and fruit*

A diet rich in a variety of vegetables and fruits can reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. Leafy green vegetables are also a source of calcium, which is important for your bones.

- Try to have at least one vegetable or fruit at every meal and as a snack.
- Enjoy vegetables steamed, baked or stir-fried instead of deep fried.
- Choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt.
- Short on time? Use pre-bagged vegetables. You can quickly toss baby carrots, leafy greens, green beans, etc. in a salad, stir-fry or casserole.

### *Grain products*

Grain products, particularly whole grains, are a source of fibre and are typically low in fat. Fibre-rich foods can help you feel full and satisfied. A diet rich in whole grains may also help reduce the risk of heart disease.

- Make at least half of your grain products whole grain.
- Eat a variety of whole grains – barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa and wild rice.
- Buy whole grain bread. Check the first ingredient listed – it should be whole wheat, whole oats, whole rye, whole grain corn, brown rice, wild rice, barley, bulgur, or oats.
- Pick a cereal made with whole grains, bran or oats, or add a spoonful of unprocessed bran or bran cereal to oatmeal for added fibre.

### *Milk and alternatives*

Calcium-rich milk and alternatives are easy to include at meals and snacks. Drink milk or fortified soy beverages by the glass or use them in recipes.

- Drink skim, 1% or 2% milk, or fortified soy beverages each day. Check the food label to see if your soy beverage is fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- Pick lower-fat milk alternatives. Examples: yogurt with 2% milk fat or less, or cheeses with less than 20% milk fat.

- Limit cream cheese, ice cream, coffee cream, whipping cream, and sour cream as these foods are high in fat and calories.
- Include milk or fortified soy beverages in your cooking. For example, you can use milk in scrambled eggs, or instead of water in canned tomato soup.

### *Meat and alternatives*

Meat and alternatives provide protein, fat and other important nutrients such as iron, zinc, magnesium and B vitamins.

- Use lean or extra lean cuts of meat. Examples: inside round roast, outside round roast, eye of round steak or roast, strip loin steak, sirloin steak, rump roast, lean and extra lean ground meat, or ground poultry.
- Trim visible fat from meat and skin from poultry before cooking. Drain extra fat after cooking.
- Bake, grill, broil or poach instead of frying. Serve without rich sauces, butter or gravy.
- Have meat alternatives like beans, lentils and tofu often. These are a cheap source of protein and they're high in fibre and low in fat. You can add them to soups, casseroles, salads and burritos.

### **Understand the Obstacles to Good Nutrition**

Poor nutrition is bad for your overall health and can also increase your chance of falling. For instance, skipping meals or not getting enough fluids can make you dizzy. (See the section in this booklet on Preventing Falls.) Deal with some obstacles to good nutrition by:

- Talking to your doctor or pharmacist about medications and how they affect your appetite.
- Seeing a dentist if you have mouth or teeth issues that affect eating.
- Learning how to change your diet to suit chronic conditions like arthritis, osteoporosis, heart disease and diabetes. See also the section in this booklet on *Osteoporosis*.

- Consider talking to a dietitian/nutritionist. They can help if you have a poor appetite, have lost lots of weight without trying, are underweight, or can't eat a wide variety of food.
- Plan meals to suit your schedule. You may prefer a large meal at noon, or a combination of small meals and snacks through the day. The pattern doesn't matter. What's important is eating a variety of foods to meet your nutritional needs every day.
- Buy foods in small, easy-to-open packaging to make meal preparation easier.
- Double the recipe and freeze the extra in serving sizes for another day.
- Make meals social. Share a potluck dinner or cook with friends. You can take meals home and freeze them for a time you don't feel like shopping or cooking.

### **Key Things to Remember**

- Good nutrition after surgery:
  - Promotes rapid recovery;
  - Reduces the risk of infection; and
  - Maintains good health.
- Learn about healthy food choices by checking *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Many people face nutritional obstacles including changes in digestion, lack of appetite, dental problems, and lack of motivation to cook (especially if living alone). These problems can increase as we age.
- Meal preparation strategies can help. Talk to a doctor, pharmacist, dentist, dietitian or nutritionist for advice.