

# Good Nutrition To Help Your Wound Heal



Allina Health

## **Good Nutrition to Help Your Wound Heal**

Good nutrition is important for your wound to heal.

What you eat affects:

- how fast your wound heals
- how strong the wound tissue becomes
- how well your body fights off infection.

Making sure you are getting enough calories, protein, liquids, and vitamins and minerals will help you heal more quickly and feel your best.

## Calories

Healing requires extra calories (beyond what is needed for your daily activities). Your body needs calories from protein, carbohydrates and fats to create new tissue to help heal your wound.

It is important to eat a variety of healthful foods to meet your body's need for more calories. This includes:

- protein
- vegetables
- fruits
- dairy
- grains.

Plan meals that include all food groups to meet your increased calorie and nutrient needs.

If you follow a vegetarian diet, make sure to include foods rich protein from non-animal sources. This could include beans, peas, nuts, tofu, tempeh, eggs and dairy foods (cheese, milk). If you also avoid dairy foods, make sure to include calcium-fortified products (nut milks such as almond milk or cashew milk, breakfast cereals, orange juice) and some dark-green leafy vegetables (collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, bok choy).

## Ways to Add Calories to Foods

If you are having trouble getting enough calories, here are some ideas to help:

- Add butter or margarine to foods like potatoes, breads, rice, noodles, cooked cereals and cooked vegetables.
  - 1 teaspoon equals 45 calories.
- Add half-and-half to mashed potatoes, soups, gravies, cereals, shakes and coffee.
  - ½ cup equals 162 calories and 4 grams of protein.
- Add cheese to sandwiches, burgers, hot dishes, eggs, vegetables, soups and pastas.
  - 1 ounce equals 75 calories and 7 grams of protein.
- Add peanut butter to breads, crackers, apples and waffles.
  - 1 tablespoon equals 86 calories and 4 grams of protein.

Your weight is the best way to tell if you are getting enough calories. Check your weight twice a week. Tell your health care provider if you lose weight.

**Your recommended amount  
of calories each day is:**

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## Protein

Try to eat protein every time you eat. Protein is important for wound healing. It provides the building material for your body to repair itself.

If you do not consume enough protein, your body will break down muscle to get the material it needs to heal the wound. This can cause muscle loss and result in longer healing time.

Protein is found in many foods including meat, dairy, eggs, soy, nuts and beans. The following chart lists some good sources of protein.

Food Source	Amount of Protein
3 ounces cooked lean meat, fish or poultry	20 to 25 grams
½ cup Greek yogurt	10 to 12 grams
1 cup milk	8 grams
¼ cup cottage cheese	8 grams
1 whole egg	7 grams
1 ounce cheese (¼ cup shredded)	6 grams
1 tablespoon peanut butter	6 grams
½ cup yogurt	4 to 5 grams

High-protein snack ideas include:

- hard boiled eggs
- yogurt
- cottage cheese
- milk
- string cheese
- cheese and crackers
- peanut butter and crackers
- nuts.

You may add protein powder to pudding, soups, milk, shakes and mashed potatoes for extra protein.

**Your recommended amount  
of protein each day is:**

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## Liquids

You will also need to drink more water than usual to help promote wound healing. Water replaces the fluid lost through your wound. It also delivers nutrients and oxygen to the wound site.

If you do not give your body enough water, it becomes dehydrated. Dehydration causes your skin to become weak, putting you at a higher risk for infection.

Water, milk, soup and juice can count toward your daily liquids.

**Tip:** You can also add flavor to your water with lemons, limes, cucumbers, pineapple and other fruits.

**Your recommended amount  
of liquid each day is:**

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Liquid Measurements		
240 milliliters (ml)	8 ounces (oz)	1 cup
960 milliliters (ml)	32 ounces (oz)	1 quart (4 cups)
3,785 milliliters (ml)	128 ounces (oz)	1 gallon (16 cups)

## Vitamins and Minerals

Eating a wide variety of healthful foods will help your body get the vitamins and minerals it needs to heal well. This includes foods from each food group: protein, vegetables, fruits, dairy and grains. If you follow a vegetarian diet, you can substitute non-animal sources of protein and dairy foods.

It is best to get the vitamins and minerals your body needs through food (not supplements). If you do wish to take a nutritional or herbal supplement, it is important to talk with your health care provider before taking it. Supplements can change how well medicine works in your body.

## Appetite

If you have trouble eating enough to promote wound healing, here are some tips to help:

- Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day instead of 3 large meals.
- Drink your beverage after you eat. This may keep you from feeling full before you have eaten enough.
- Sit upright when you eat to help with digestion.
- Sometimes cold foods without much smell are better tolerated. Try a hard-boiled egg, cottage cheese, cheese or Greek yogurt instead of cooked meat or fish.
- Keep healthful snacks on hand to enjoy when you feel like eating.
- Snack on foods high in calories and protein such as:
  - peanut butter on crackers, apple slices or celery
  - nuts
  - milkshakes, chocolate milk or eggnog
  - pudding, yogurt or custard
  - high-protein granola with milk.

Your health care provider may recommend a ready-to-drink nutrition beverage if you cannot get enough calories and protein through food. You can find these at most grocery stores. Examples include:

- Boost<sup>®</sup>, Ensure<sup>®</sup> or Sustacal<sup>®</sup>
- Carnation<sup>®</sup> Instant Breakfast<sup>®</sup>
- whey protein powder.

## Safe Food Handling and Storage

Foodborne illness is caused by eating food that contains harmful bacteria, parasites or viruses. When you have a wound, it is especially important to prevent yourself from getting sick from contaminated food.

Here are some tips for safe food handling and storage:

- Wash your hands, counter tops, utensils and cutting boards with warm, soapy water. Wash anything that comes in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or unwashed fresh produce.
- Wash your hands before and after handling foods and after using the bathroom, changing your dressing or handling pets.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water before eating.
- Clean up spills in your refrigerator right away. Throw away expired foods and leftovers that are not going to be eaten.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate from other items in your shopping cart and refrigerator.
- Use 1 cutting board for raw meats and another board for fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Put uncooked meat, poultry or seafood in sealed containers or plastic bags when storing in the refrigerator. Place on separate plates when raw and when cooked.



Visit [befoodsafe.org](http://befoodsafe.org) for more information about safe food handling and storage.

- Cook all foods well and use a clean thermometer to ensure proper temperatures. Cook foods to the following temperatures:
  - **Chicken and turkey:** 165 F
  - **Casseroles and leftovers:** 165 F
  - **Ground meats:** 160 F
  - **Eggs:** 160 F (or until yolks and whites are firm)
  - **Beef, pork, veal and lamb:** 145 F
  - **Fish and shellfish:** 145 F
  - **Ham (uncooked):** 145 F
  - **Ham (fully cooked):** 140 F
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the refrigerator always stays at 40 F or colder. This will help prevent foodborne illness.
- Refrigerate food quickly. Cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from multiplying.
- Never thaw foods at room temperature.

### Whom to Call With Questions

Talk with your health care provider if you have questions about nutrition for wound healing.

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