

## **Eating to Heal**

### *Your nutritional needs*

***In this section:***

- ***A Balanced, Healthy Diet***
- ***If Your Appetite Is Low***
- ***Plan Ahead***
- ***Foods for Specific Health Issues***
- ***Food Safety***

---

*What you eat is important for your overall health, but especially for wound healing and for your bowel program.*

*~ Rehab Staff Member*

---

Good nutrition is very important after an illness or injury. The foods you eat affect how much you weigh and how well you heal.

### **A Balanced, Healthy Diet**

Eating a balanced diet means including a variety of foods from each of the different food groups every day. This will help ensure that all your nutrient needs are met. No one food contains all the nutrients your body needs.

Eating healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods will give your body the nutrients it needs. And, since these foods are usually lower in calories, they will also help you maintain a healthy weight.



*A healthy, balanced diet includes plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.*

## **Breads, Cereals, Rice, and Pasta**

When you buy breads, cereals, and other grain products, choose whole grains when you can. Whole grains have more nutrients than grains that have been processed. For instance, oatmeal and oat bran contain soluble fiber, which reduce how much cholesterol your body absorbs.

## **Fresh Fruits and Vegetables**

Eat a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially dark green, red, and orange vegetables. The more colorful fruits and vegetables contain higher amounts of *phytochemicals*, which help your body fight disease.

## **Protein Foods**

Eat a variety of protein foods, including:

- Lean meat, poultry, and seafood
- Eggs
- Legumes (beans, lentils, peas, and soy)
- Nuts and seeds (unsalted)
- Low-fat dairy products

## **Fats**

- Use less solid fat such as butter, stick margarine, and shortening. Instead, use liquid fat such as olive and canola oil.
- Choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products.
- Limit foods that contain hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils (trans fats). These fats increase your risk for heart disease, stroke, and other health problems. Read the “Nutrition Facts” label before you buy packaged foods.

## **If Your Appetite Is Low**

Here are some tips to increase calories and protein if you are having trouble eating regular meals:

- Try to eat smaller meals more often.
- Try not to skip meals.

- Add avocados or guacamole, olives, nuts, and/or seeds to salads and entrees.
- Add sugar, honey, jam, or syrup for extra calories.
- Add low-fat milk to soups instead of water.
- Add diced or ground meat to soups and casseroles.
- Add protein powder or nonfat milk powder to drinks, soups, mashed potatoes, pudding, casseroles, and hot cereals.
- Snack on nuts, trail mix, yogurt, or cottage cheese with fruit.

## **Plan Ahead**

There may be days when you are sick or do not have the energy to cook. To plan ahead for these times:

- Write down your planned menus for several days. When you shop, make sure you buy everything you need for each of those meals.
- When preparing meals, make a double batch and freeze servings for later. When needed, you can thaw and reheat small portions of meat, vegetables, or casseroles.

Also, make sure you keep foods on hand that are easy to prepare, such as:

- Frozen, pre-made meals. Choose brands such as Healthy Choice that contain less salt and fat. Always choose meals with less than 500 mg of sodium.
- Liquid nutritional supplements such as Ensure, Boost, or Carnation Instant Breakfast. Many chain stores also have their own brands that cost less than these name brands.
- Low-fat cheese, such as low-fat cottage cheese, string cheese, “lite” cream cheese, or low-fat yogurt.
- Dried fruit, nuts, and nut butters.
- Single servings of pudding, custard, ice cream, yogurt, desserts, soups, or fruits.
- Sandwiches such as grilled cheese, peanut butter and jelly, or egg or tuna salad.

- Canned foods such as tuna, baked beans, ravioli, pasta, vegetables, fruits, and corned beef hash.
- Canned or frozen fruit and vegetables.
- Instant hot cereal made with low-fat milk.
- Canned salmon, tuna, or sardines. These fish are high in omega-3 fats, which are good for your heart.
- Low-fat pasta, such as low-fat lasagna or ravioli.

## **Foods for Specific Health Issues**

The foods you eat affect all aspects of your health. This includes your skin, bowel, bladder, and bone health. If you have questions about how nutrition can impact your illness or injury, work with a dietitian. Together, you can create a diet plan that fits your needs.

Here are some health issues to think about and how your food choices can help:

### **Wound Healing**

Wounds need protein to heal. If you have a pressure sore or an open wound, it is very important that you eat enough protein. Ask your doctor or dietitian how much protein you should eat every day.

### **Constipation**

Reduced activity, illness, injury, or surgery can cause problems with constipation. If you are constipated:

- Try eating more high-fiber foods. A high-fiber diet may also help reduce your risk of heart disease and diabetes.
- Be sure to drink enough fluids, especially if you are on a high-fiber diet. Try to drink 8 cups (8 ounces each) of caffeine-free beverages, for a total of 64 ounces a day.

If you are just starting to eat more fiber, begin slowly. Over time, increase the amount of fiber you are eating. The ideal amount is 20 to 35 grams of fiber every day, from a variety of food sources.



*Bran cereals and berries are good sources of fiber.*

Some high-fiber foods include:

- Berries, fresh fruits with skin, and vegetables
- Oatmeal and oat bran, bran cereals
- Dried beans (cooked), peas, lentils, nuts
- Whole-grain pasta, brown rice

You can also make this high-fiber supplement to help add fiber to your diet:

### ***Homemade High-Fiber Supplement***

- 1 cup unprocessed bran
- 1 cup applesauce
- ¼ cup prune juice
- Cinnamon to taste

Combine all ingredients and chill in the refrigerator overnight. Take 1 to 2 tablespoons, 1 to 2 times a day, with 8 ounces of water.

## **Reflux**

If you have reflux, here are some tips to help reduce your symptoms:

- Eat low-fat foods.
- Instead of eating three large meals, eat smaller amounts more often.
- Avoid foods that irritate the digestive system, such as coffee, chocolate, mint, carbonated beverages, citrus, and tomato.
- Sit upright while you are eating.
- Raise the head of your bed.
- Do not eat for 3 hours before going to bed.
- Do not wear clothes that fit tightly around your stomach and abdomen.
- If you smoke, quit.

## Food Safety

While you are healing, it is also very important to keep your food safe to eat. The 4 simple steps to food safety are:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often, and wash fresh fruits and vegetables well before eating.
- **Separate:** Use separate cutting boards, plates, and storage areas for produce (fruits and vegetables) and for animal proteins (meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs).
- **Cook:** Cook to the right temperature and keep food hot after cooking.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate perishable foods within 2 hours, never thaw or marinate foods on the counter, and know when to throw foods away.

Learn more about these and other food safety issues at [www.FoodSafety.gov](http://www.FoodSafety.gov).

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

While you are a patient on Inpatient Rehab, call:  
206-598-4800

After discharge, call your primary care provider or UWMC's Rehabilitation Clinic: 206-598-4295