

# Eating to Optimize Surgery or Treatment



If you are having surgery or major medical treatment soon, it's important to pay extra attention to nutrition. What you eat – and how much you eat – can help you do better during and after surgery and treatment.

## **A healthy, balanced diet with extra protein can help you:**

- Build strength to prepare your body for surgery or treatment
- Recover better after surgery
- Heal wounds, bones and infections
- Tolerate cancer treatments and other medical treatments better
- Have enough energy and strength for physical therapy

## **Poor nutrition has been shown to:**

- Increase infections and surgery complications
- Impair wound healing
- Increase the amount of time spent in hospitals
- Increase the amount of care and support needed after leaving the hospital

## Five tips to eat better, feel better, recover better

### **1. Get plenty of fuel**

- Make sure you're eating and drinking enough healthful foods and liquids in the weeks leading up to your surgery or treatment. Your body needs extra fuel, protein, vitamins, minerals and liquids to heal.
- Eat 2 to 3 meals and 1 to 3 healthy snacks each day.

### **2. Eat foods from all of the food groups:**

Protein

Dairy

Vegetables

Grains

Fruit

### 3. Eat plenty of protein

- Eat protein at every meal, especially at breakfast and after physical therapy.
- Good sources of protein include fish, chicken, meats or meat substitutes, milk, cheese, yogurt, beans, nuts and seeds.

### 4. If you don't feel hungry, try to eat anyway

- Eat smaller meals and snacks more often, and include protein.
- Eat with a friend or family member. Adults who share meals together tend to eat better. See *Mealtime for Healthy Adults* under Educational Materials at [www.healthoregon.org/sharedmeals](http://www.healthoregon.org/sharedmeals) for more information.

## Weight matters before surgery and treatment

Going through a serious illness, major medical treatment or surgery raises your risk of malnutrition – even if you are overweight.

### If you are overweight

- Although losing weight ahead of time may improve surgery results, dieting right before surgery is not recommended – it increases the risk of malnutrition and makes it harder for your body to heal itself.
- Stop any weight-loss efforts 1 to 2 weeks before surgery or treatment and for several weeks after.
- Talk to your doctor or dietitian about when and how to restart your weight-loss program.
- Avoid rapid-weight-loss diets (losing more than 2 pounds per week).

### If you are underweight

- People who are underweight have more trouble recovering from major illnesses and surgeries.
- Adults 65+ may look like their weight is normal, but are considered underweight if their body mass index is less than 22 or 23. Find out what your BMI is at [www.bmi-calculator.net](http://www.bmi-calculator.net).
- Adding 400 extra calories and 20–30 extra grams of protein daily can make a big difference in your recovery after surgery.
- Boost your calories and protein by eating more healthful, nutrient-rich foods such as cheese, avocados nuts, peanut butter and eggs.
- Adding more foods like gravy, sauces and jam is OK to boost your weight.
- If eating is difficult, try homemade shakes and smoothies.

**If you don't have the energy for cooking, pre-made nutrition drinks, frozen meals and healthy snack bars can help.**

- Tell your doctors and nurses if you lose weight before or after your surgery or treatment.

**If you are currently at the right weight**

- Try to keep your weight the same before and after your surgery or treatment by eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- If you lose weight after surgery or treatment, eat more and boost your protein until your weight stabilizes.

## Weight matters after surgery and treatment

Losing weight in the weeks after surgery or major medical treatment can slow healing and weaken the immune system. Tell your doctor if you lose 5 or more pounds after your surgery or treatment.

## Ask your doctor or dietitian for help

If you find it hard to keep your weight where it should be, talk to your doctor or to a dietitian. They can recommend specific tips to help you stabilize your weight to optimize your recovery from surgery or medical treatment.

Be sure to talk with your doctor and surgeon about any supplements, pills, herbs or other medicinals you take.

This information is for general educational purposes only – always follow your doctor's recommendations, and check with your doctor if you have any questions.