

Nutrition Education & Facilitators Guide to:
MALNUTRITION

Eating to Optimize Surgery or Treatment Discussion Guide

For background information on malnutrition, please refer to the [Eating for Your Best Health Discussion Guide](#). You may choose to introduce the basics of malnutrition before using this discussion guide.

Materials Needed:

- Eating to Optimize Surgery or Treatment Fact Sheet
- Weight scale and tool to measure height, if doing optional activity
- [BMI Handout](#) for every participant (only need first page of PDF)
- Pens for every participant

Refer to “Eating to Optimize Surgery or Treatment” [Fact Sheet](#)

Introduction:

Many of you may be currently undergoing medical treatment or have an upcoming surgery. If this is not true for you, you probably know someone who is. And, it might be true for you in the case of future medical treatment or surgery.

SAY: Nutrition has an important impact of the success and ease of your surgery or treatment.

What you eat – and how much you eat – can help you do better during and after surgery and treatment.

DO: Ask tables to work together or ask audience to work in pairs. “Choose a partner.” Hand out *Eating to Optimize Surgery or Treatment* fact sheet.

SAY: Follow along with me on the fact sheet to see why good nutrition is important before 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

Eating well will help you avoid the consequences of poor nutrition, such as:

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

Today we will discuss what a healthy, balanced diet with extra protein should look like.

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Tips to eat better, feel better and recover better

SAY:

With the people at your table or with the person sitting next to you, answer these questions. We'll go over each one after you discuss your answers with each other.

1. How many times do you eat in a day?
 - In order to heal after surgery or treatment, your body needs extra fuel. Getting enough protein, vitamins, and minerals is very important for recovery.
 - Try eating 2-3 meals and 1-3 snacks each day to assure you are getting all the nutrients you need and eating the total amount of food you need to maintain a healthful weight.
 - Meals and snacks do not need to be large and can be simple, like a boiled egg and toast or a simple yogurt smoothie.
2. How much do you drink each day?
 - Hydration is important for recovery as well.
 - Try drinking 8 glasses of fluids per day (64 ounces)
 - Water and milk are good options
 - All fluids (coffee/tea, soup) count toward the 8 glass total
 - Try carrying a water bottle around with you so you have easy access to fluids at all times
 - Some medications and certain medical conditions may affect your fluid needs. Check with your doctor to see what amount of fluids is appropriate for you.
3. The five food groups include: grains, fruits, vegetables, protein and dairy.
 - It is important to eat foods from each food group every day.
 - When you eat a variety of foods from each food group, in the right amounts for you, you are likely to get the important nutrients you need to be healthy.
4. Do you eat foods from each of these food groups EVERY day?
 - *Whole grains*
 - Examples: 100% whole wheat bread or rolls, whole wheat cereal, oatmeal
 - *Colorful fruits and vegetables*
 - Fresh, frozen, or canned (reduced sodium) are all good choices
 - Cook vegetables to make them easier to chew
 - Examples: carrots, squash, spinach, broccoli
 - *Dairy*
 - Examples: milk, cheese, and yogurt
 - If lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk (it has the same nutrition)

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- Hard cheeses are usually low-lactose and the cultures in yogurt help with digestion.
- *Protein*
 - We will discuss next!

5. The most important of these food groups before surgery or treatment is PROTEIN. What protein foods do you regularly eat?

- Protein plays a key role in helping our body heal after surgery and treatment.
- Eat protein at every meal (bonus points for eating some at every snack too!), especially at breakfast.
 - Goal at each meal: 20-30 grams or 3-4 oz.
- If you go to physical therapy, be sure to have a snack with protein after.
- Good sources of protein
 - Fish, chicken, turkey, pork, beef
 - Eggs
 - Tofu, tempeh
 - Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, cheese
 - Beans (black, kidney, pinto, refried, garbanzo), lentils
 - Low sodium nuts and nut butter (such as peanut butter)

SAY: With these foods in mind, describe a favorite breakfast, lunch, and dinner, each including a good source of protein.

6. How do you decide when to eat?

- Always eat when you feel hungry
 - How to tell you're hungry: stomach grumbles, irritability, start thinking about/craving food
 - How do *you* notice you're hungry?
- Before surgery/treatment, we also recommend eating even when you don't have these hunger signals. It is so important to get proper nutrition, and eating frequently helps you all the beneficial nutrients.
- Be sure to eat 2-3 meals AND 1-3 snacks per day.
 - Eat at the times when you are hungry, but if you don't feel hungry often enough to eat 2-3 meals AND 1-2 snacks, try having a snack sometime when you are *not full*.
 - Don't feel pressured to eat when food seems unappetizing or you are very full.
- An easy way to eat enough is to eat *smaller* meals and snacks *more often*.
- Try stimulating your hunger to eat more
 - Take a walk
 - Prepare foods that smell good to you. Whole wheat toast is a great option.
- Try eating with a friend or family member. Adults who share meals together tend to eat better.

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Weight Matters

Optional Activity: Help participants determine if they are over/under/normal weight. Take each participant's height and weight and circle them on a [BMI chart](#). Tell each participant what their BMI is and what weight category that puts them in.

NOTE: If not doing optional activity, still pass out BMI charts and ask participants to circle their height and weight and find their BMI and weight category.

SAY: BMI is a helpful measure to assess weight status. However, BMI doesn't take into account ethnicity, body composition (muscle vs. fat), or frame size. BMI for an individual is an indicator, which may need interpretation by a physician or other health care provider. Talk to your doctor to determine your health status on a more individual level.

SAY: 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 fall into the overweight or obese category, here's what you need to know:

- Although losing weight well 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.
- Always avoid rapid weight loss diets (losing more than 2 pounds per week) because they could cause you to lose too much muscle.

If you fall into the underweight category, here are some pointers for you:

- People who are underweight tend to 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.
- Adding 250 to 400 extra calories and 20–30 extra grams of protein daily can make a big difference in your recovery after surgery, especially from a major surgery.
- Boost your calories and protein by eating more healthful, nutrient-rich foods such as cheese, fish, poultry, eggs, avocados, nuts, and peanut butter.
- Adding gravy, sauces, and jam makes food taste better and easier to eat.
 - Caution: Watch out for high sodium and salt in some sauces and gravies.
- If eating is difficult, try drinking shakes and smoothies.
- Snack ideas:
 - Cheese and crackers
 - Peanut butter and jelly toast (or English muffin)

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- Banana and peanut butter
- Guacamole and black or refried beans with tortilla chips
- Eggs with cheese and/or avocado on toast
- Full-fat cottage cheese with canned peaches
- A handful of mixed nuts
- Turkey/roast beef and cheese sandwich
- Cheese or bean tortilla
- Homemade shake ideas (add dry milk or protein powder):
 - Vanilla ice cream or yogurt with peanut butter and frozen fruit
 - Vanilla ice cream or yogurt with orange juice and banana
 - Chocolate ice cream with frozen berries and nuts/nut butter
 - Strawberry yogurt with banana and peanut butter
 - Yogurt and fruit smoothie

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

If you are in the normal weight category, here are some pointers:

- Try to keep your weight the same before and after your surgery or treatment by eating a consistent healthy, balanced diet.
- If you lose weight after surgery or treatment, eat more and focus on protein until your weight comes back to normal.

Weight is still very important *after* surgery and treatment

- You may not have as much of an appetite after surgery or treatment, but it is still very important to continue eating a nutrient-rich diet.
- Losing weight in the weeks after surgery or major medical treatment can slow healing and weaken the immune system.
- Protein-rich shakes and smoothies are good choices at this time. They are an easy way to get the calories and nutrients you need.
- Tell your doctor or dietitian if you lose 5 or more pounds after your surgery or treatment.

Most importantly, if you're having trouble with your weight (either too high or too low), ask your doctor or dietitian for help.

- They can recommend specific tips to help you find the right weight to optimize your recovery from surgery or medical treatment.
- Be sure to talk with your doctor, dietitian, and surgeon about any supplements, pills, herbs or other medicinals you take.

SAY: Any questions? If you prefer to talk to me one-on-one, I'll be here after class for a bit to answer questions and chat.

Thank you for coming!