NUTRITION IN WOUND HEALING

WHY IS GOOD NUTRITION IMPORTANT IN WOUND HEALING?

Nutrition is one of the cornerstones of wound healing, however it is often ignored. Poor nutrition before and/or during wound healing may slow the rate of wound healing and result in a weak wound. Carbohydrates, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, zinc, iron, and water are important nutritional factors in wound healing, and are described in this pamphlet.

CARBOHYDRATES

Carbohydrates, like grains, cereals, peas and beans, pasta, bread, natural sugars found in fruits, vegetables, and milk and added sugars, are your body's most readily available source of energy. Carbohydrates are important as they let your body spare protein for tissue growth.

PROTEIN

Protein, found in meat, eggs, milk products, peas and beans, seeds, and fortified grains, is important for wound healing as it helps:

• Hormones and enzymes develop;
• Cells multiply;
• Skin and tissues grow;
• Fight and prevent infection;
• Control fluid and minerals in your body, and;
• Move fats, minerals, and oxygen around your body and to your wound.

For more information on wound care, nutrition, wound healing, and for community resources, go to: swrwoundcareprogram.ca

Tips to maximize your or your loved one’s nutrition in the presence of a wound.

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COMMON QUESTIONS

VITAMIN A

Vitamin A, found in liver, milk and milk products, egg yolks, and fish oils, is needed for wound healing as it helps:

• Fight wound infection;
• Develop collagen in your wound (which forms strong tissue in your wound), and it;
• Keep your healed wound from opening again.

VITAMIN C

Vitamin C helps with wound healing as it:

• Fights and prevents wound infection;
• Helps grow strong tissue in your wound, and;
• Keeps your wound closed once it heals over.

You can find vitamin C in citrus juice and fruits, strawberries, tomatoes, sweet peppers (especially red ones), potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and cantaloupe.

ZINC

Zinc is important for wound healing as it helps:

• New cells grow and divide;
• Make your wound tissue strong;
• Get oxygen to your wound, and;
• Prevent infection.

Your body can use iron from animal sources, like meat and eggs, better than iron from plant sources. Iron is also better absorbed in your body if it is eaten alongside a food that is rich in vitamin C.

WATER

Water is a nutrient and is important in wound healing as it helps:

• Hydrate the wound site;
• Carry vitamins, minerals, oxygen, sugars, and other small molecules to the wound;
• Remove waste from your wound site, and;
• Control the temperature of your wound.

Unless your doctor has told you otherwise, you should drink at least 1.5 Liters of fluid per day. You can increase the amount of water and other non-cafeinated fluids you drink by adding:

• Popsicles;
• Jell-O;
• Soup;
• Sorbet and ice cream;
• Milkshakes;
• Ice chips;
• Canned fruit with its juice, and;
• Coffee creamers or milk.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM GETTING ENOUGH VITAMINS/NUTRIENTS IN MY DIET?

If you are following the Canadian Food Guide you are likely getting enough nutrients to allow your wound to heal. However, if you are unsure, try keeping a food diary for a week to see if you are missing out on any important items. If you are, try adding food sources of those missing nutrients first. If you are unable to meet your nutritional needs by changes in your diet, you may need to see a dietitian. Dietitians assess you and your diet and suggest interventions to improve your nutrition. Suggestions may include the use of nutritional and/or dietary supplements. If you are unable to chew and/or swallow well enough, or if your body is unable to absorb nutrients right, you may need tube feeds or parenteral feeds (nutrition through an intravenous line, or IV). This would be decided by you, your doctor and you dietitian together.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I CONSIDER TO IMPROVE MY NUTRITION?

• Make sure your teeth are in good shape, and that any dental problems are taken care of;
• If you have dentures, make sure they are fitting well and in good repair;
• Talk to your doctor about any food or fluid restrictions you have, and whether they can be changed or stopped;
• If you are having problems swallowing (this includes coughing when you eat), let your doctor know. You may need a swallowing assessment;
• Add snacks to your diet that are high in protein;