

# Healthy eating for healing

## **Why is healthy eating important?**

Wounds need extra nutrition (or 'nutrients') above your normal needs to heal properly. Your body gets these nutrients from the healthy foods you eat. If you do not get enough of the right nutrients from your food, your healing may be slowed, and your wound may even be prone to getting worse again.

# What can I do?

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating is a good tool to use to ensure you eat the right foods from the five main food groups. See below.



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- The number of serves you eat a day of these foods depends on your body size and level of activity **and the amount of wound healing required**
- All nutrients are important. Protein and energy (calories or kilojoules) are the most common nutrients needed in higher amounts for good wound healing. You need to have **both** protein and energy in the right amounts; a deficiency in one will delay or reverse wound healing
- In specific cases you may also need extra vitamin C, zinc and iron. Your health professional can help you when this is needed
- If you have a wound that has not healed for 3 months or more, you should see a dietitian so they can assess if any important nutrients are missing in your diet

# Food groups

## Red meats, fish, poultry, eggs and nuts

The main nutrients provided:

- Energy (calories or kilojoules)
- Protein
- Zinc and Iron

Choose 1½ – 2 serves of these foods per day

| EXAMPLE OF ONE SERVE                        | TIPS TO INCLUDE THESE FOODS IN YOUR DIET  |
|---|---|
| 80–120g cooked fish fillet                  | Meat, chicken or fish with vegetables or salad for your main meal<br><br>A vegetable soup with soup mix or meat added |
| 2 small eggs                                | Eggs on toast for breakfast or another light meal   |
| 1/3 cup lentils, chick peas or canned beans | Baked beans on toast, hummus dip on crackers  |
| 1/3 cup nuts                                | A handful of nuts or peanut butter on bread for a snack   |





## Bread, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles

Nutrients provided:

- Energy in the form of carbohydrates
- Vitamins and minerals including B vitamins, zinc, iron
- Protein – in wholegrain foods and breakfast cereals based on whole-wheat or grains

Choose 4–7 serves of these foods per day

| EXAMPLE OF ONE SERVE  | TIPS TO INCLUDE THESE FOODS IN YOUR DIET  |
|---|---|
| 1 slice of wholemeal or wholegrain bread<br>4 whole-wheat cracker biscuits<br>1/2 a medium bread roll | Toast or a sandwich for breakfast or lunch<br>Having cracker biscuits with cheese, tomato or avocado topping<br>A meat and salad roll for lunch |
| 1/2 cup of cooked rice, pasta or noodles  | Rice or pasta with your main meal instead of potato   |
| 2/3 cup of porridge or cereal flakes  | Breakfast cereals   |



## Vegetables

Nutrients provided:

- Vitamin C – particularly in green vegetables and salad vegetables, tomatoes
- Vitamin A – dark green vegetables, pumpkin, carrot
- Fibre – in all vegetables
- Carbohydrate – particularly in potatoes, corn, parsnip
- Other vitamins and minerals – essential for body health is provided by all vegetables

Choose 5 serves of these foods per day

| EXAMPLE OF ONE SERVE   | TIPS TO INCLUDE THESE FOODS IN YOUR DIET   |
|--|--|
| 1 cup of salad vegetables  | Try and eat a variety of fresh vegetables. When you are unable to do this, you can eat frozen or tinned vegetables as an alternative |
| 1/2 cup beans, lentils, peas, zucchini, mushrooms, tomatoes, capsicum, cucumber, cabbage, cauliflower, spinach | Extra vegetables can be added to soups, casseroles and stews. Add to lasagne, mince sauce or quiche                                  |
| 1 medium potato or parsnip   | Bake a potato and add salad vegetable toppings for a light meal  |



## Fruit

Nutrients provided:

- Vitamins, minerals, fibre and carbohydrates for energy

Choose 2 serves of these foods per day

| EXAMPLE OF ONE SERVE   | TIPS TO INCLUDE THESE FOODS IN YOUR DIET   |
|--|--|
| 1 medium-sized apple, orange, banana or pear   | Eat fruit with the skin on where possible and choose fresh fruit rather than fruit juice |
| 1 cup of diced pieces or canned fruit  | Fresh fruit with the skin on is higher in fibre than peeled fruit or fruit juice         |
| 2 smaller fruit for example, apricots, kiwi fruit or plums                             | Make a fruit salad for a tasty dessert   |
| About 8 strawberries, 20 grapes, 4 dried apricots, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit juice | Make some fruit scones with dried fruit  |



## Dairy foods

Nutrients provided:

- Calcium, protein and vitamin B12

Choose 3 serves of these foods per day



| EXAMPLE OF ONE SERVE   | TIPS TO INCLUDE THESE FOODS IN YOUR DIET   |
|--|--|
| 250ml or 1 cup of soy, cow or goat milk<br>½ cup evaporated milk           | Consider a milk drink for a snack or before going to bed<br>Use reduced fat products with care. Consult your doctor or dietitian before using these products |
| 200g (1 small carton) of yoghurt (plain or fruit)<br>250ml (1 cup) custard | Yoghurt or custard as a dessert instead of jelly<br>Yoghurt with fresh fruit or cereal   |
| 40g (2 slices) of cheese   | Cheese on cracker biscuits or extra cheese on vegetables or pasta  |





## Extras

Foods in this group are:

- Fats and oils – margarine, butter, cooking oils
- Sugar – as an additive or in lollies
- Cakes, biscuits, chocolates
- Fried foods and takeaway (such as fish and chips or Chinese)
- Alcohol

Foods and fluids in this group are 'extras' that are not essential for nutrients but add enjoyment. In specific cases they can be very useful for extra energy needed for wound healing.

Ask your dietitian or health professional how these foods could help you, particularly if you have diabetes or are overweight.

# What else can I do?

## Drinking (*hydration*)

Fluids include water, juice, milk, soups, ice cream, jelly and yoghurt. Also soft drinks, diet drinks, tea and coffee.

It is very important to drink enough fluids to help your wound to heal. Try to drink eight glasses of fluid a day **unless you have been advised otherwise by your doctor.**

Contrary to popular belief habitual tea and coffee drinkers do not suffer dehydration from the caffeine in these drinks. Tea and coffee can be useful for maintaining hydration.



## Tips to remember

- 1 A healthy diet includes three meals a day, or a number of smaller, more frequent meals
- 2 Try to include protein in each meal and eat it first to ensure you get the nutrients you need most before you get full
- 3 Choose foods low in salt and limit your alcohol intake
- 4 If you have any concerns with eating – such as difficulty chewing, a lack of appetite or have concerns with your weight – discuss them with your dietitian or health professional
- 5 Coughing after eating or drinking may be a sign that you have difficulty swallowing. Discuss this with your health professional
- 6 Ask a dietitian if you have any questions about nutrition. A dietitian can be accessed via your local Community Health Centre or DAA (Dietitians Association of Australia) website – [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

## References

Australian Government: Department of Health and Ageing. (2005). *Food for health, dietary guidelines for Australians*. Commonwealth of Australia.

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Nutrition Australia: *Promoting optimal health by encouraging food variety and physical activity*. <http://nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/healthy-living-pyramid> (accessed November 2010)

## Disclaimer

This health care guide is part of the 'Connected Wound Care' program, which provides important information about wound care. All care has been taken to ensure information is current and best-practice, however always consult your healthcare professional if you have any concerns or queries.

## Acknowledgements

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