

Healthy Eating After Burn Injury— for Adults

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<https://msktc.org/burn/factsheets>

BURN Factsheet

This factsheet explains the importance of proper nutrition as you recover and heal from a burn injury. It describes the nutritional needs during your recovery in the hospital and at home and offers tips for balancing your diet as you heal.

This factsheet is intended to inform people with burn injury and their families about nutrition during hospitalization and after they return home. Burn injury dramatically increases your nutrition needs. The larger the burn size, the more nutrients you need to heal. A diet high in calories and protein

- Supports the immune system to decrease risk of infection
- Helps wounds heal faster;
- Maintains muscle mass
- Minimizes weight loss to support rehabilitation



How Are Nutrition Needs Determined?

A dietitian and the medical team decide how much nutrition (e.g., calories and protein) you need. They set your nutrition needs based on many factors, including your weight, height, and age, and the burn size. Vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin C, zinc, and vitamin A, are also important for healing and preventing infection. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet will help you receive enough nutrients to support wound healing. Your medical team will let you know if you need to take any extra supplements.

How Do I Meet My Nutrition Needs While Hospitalized?

Healing from a burn injury requires more calories and protein than any other type of injury. In the hospital, a dietitian will work with you to make sure you are getting enough nutrients to heal.

After a burn injury, it is important to eat a balanced diet that includes a lot of protein in addition to other foods such as fruits, vegetables, and grains. You should eat high-protein foods at every meal and as snacks.



The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center works with Burn Model System (BMS) centers to provide free research-based rehabilitation resources for people living with burn injury (See <https://msktc.org/burn> for more information). This factsheet has been approved by experts from the BMS centers.

Examples of high-protein foods include:

- Lean meat
- Eggs
- Dairy Products (milk, yogurt, cheese)
- Tofu
- Lentils
- Beans
- Nuts



Drinking milkshakes or smoothies may help you to meet your calorie and protein needs. If needed, the medical team may also recommend certain vitamin or mineral supplements.

You may need more nutrients than what you get from eating only by mouth. If this is the case, tube feeding can deliver more nutrients. A soft, flexible tube inserted through the nose reaches the stomach and delivers liquid formula that contains all of the nutrients needed for healing. Tube feeding will continue as long as necessary.

What if I Have Diabetes or High Blood Sugar?

After a burn injury, stress forces the level of sugar in your blood to increase. High blood sugar interferes with healing. Even if you don't have diabetes, you may have high blood sugar. Your health care team may prescribe insulin, which lowers blood sugar. Until your blood sugar improves, you might have to limit the amount of foods you consume that are high in carbohydrates, such as juice, high-sugar drinks, and desserts.

What Should I Eat at Home?

After leaving the hospital, eating a balanced diet is the best way to make sure you are staying nourished. Remember, your body now requires fewer calories than when you were hospitalized. If your burn wounds are still open, your diet should include extra protein. As you continue to heal, your nutrition needs will be like they were before the injury. At the hospital, you likely ate large meals, drank nutrition supplements, and ate a lot of snacks, so your appetite may be big when you get home. Now it is important to focus on a balanced diet. Avoid foods with little nutritional value, such as sugary beverages, desserts, candy, fatty meats, and white breads or crackers. Eat more lean meats, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and low-fat dairy.



Ask your health care provider about exercise to help maintain a healthy weight. Exercise is important for long-term health and avoiding chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. For more information, refer to the Exercise After Burn Injury Factsheet (<https://msktc.org/burn/factsheets/exercise-after-burn-injury>).

Tips for a Well-Balanced Diet at Home

- Eat small, frequent meals and snacks to keep from feeling so hungry that you eat too much at one time.
- Include protein with each meal and snack. Protein helps you stay full and your body stay strong. Good sources of protein are beef, chicken, pork, eggs, beans, nuts, milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Slice fruits and vegetables for an easy snack on the go. They provide many key nutrients for healing and overall health.
- Change the flavors of the foods you eat to keep them tasty and fun. Cook with spices and herbs, such as rosemary, mint, garlic, cayenne pepper, and basil.
- Drink water during the day to stay hydrated and avoid unnecessary calories. Many drinks have fat and sugar that your body doesn't need. Read the nutrition facts on food labels.
- Choose whole-grain breads and other foods that are high in fiber. These will help keep you feeling full between meals and can support regular bowel movements.



- Try to eat only when you're hungry. Avoid eating for other reasons, such as boredom, lack of control, anger, or hopelessness. Keep a food log and track your mood to see if your eating is connected to your emotions.
- Talk to your doctor about any vitamins and supplements you would like to take at home.

Sample Menu

This menu provides about 1,750 calories and 103 grams of protein per day. This sample menu should be balanced with physical activity.

Breakfast	2 scrambled eggs 1 slice whole-wheat toast 1 tsp. butter 1 medium banana 8 oz. nonfat milk
Lunch	Turkey sandwich: 2 slices whole-wheat bread, 2 slices deli turkey, lettuce, tomato, and mustard 1 cup nonfat yogurt 8 oz. water

Snack	1 medium apple 2 Tbsp. peanut butter 8 oz. water
Dinner	3–4 oz. baked salmon 1 cup mixed vegetables ½ cup brown rice 8 oz. nonfat milk
Snack	½ cup ice cream ½ cup sliced strawberries

Additional Resources

Contact your local burn center and ask for an appointment with a dietitian who will create a nutrition action plan to meet your specific lifestyle and nutrition goals.

The MyPlate website (<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>) contains nutrition information, healthy eating tips, and ideas for increasing physical activity.



References

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Authorship

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Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. The contents of this factsheet were originally developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR; grant number 90DP0012) and were updated under an NIDILRR grant (90DPKT0009). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this factsheet do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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