

Eating well before your surgery

To be issued at your pre-surgical assessment or at least 6 weeks prior to admission for surgery.

This is general advice only – specific procedures such as gastrointestinal or head and neck surgery may require individualised guidance.

Eating well before surgery means that you will recover more quickly, gain greater benefit from your surgery and reduce the risk of infection. Before you go into hospital for your surgery, it is important to eat a balanced diet to help your recovery. Once you have had your surgery, it is important to start eating as soon as you are able.

Aim to eat 3 regular meals a day with healthy snacks in between. If you have a poor appetite, eating little and often helps to provide all the energy and nourishment you need – try to eat 6 small meals a day instead. Before your surgery, try to stock your cupboards and freezer with healthy foods and drinks so you won't have to worry about shopping during your recovery. If you are unable to cook, ready meals are helpful – check the label and choose healthy varieties.

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



Try to have foods from each group shown – most of your food should be fruit and vegetables, and starchy carbohydrates with some dairy and protein foods. Food and drinks high in fat and sugar should form the smallest part of your overall diet – it is OK to have these occasionally, but try to limit them for overall health.



Bread, rice,
potatoes, pasta
and other starchy foods

Milk and
dairy foods

Sugary drinks
and/or sugar

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables provide you with fibre, vitamins and minerals to help your body repair. Try to include fruit and/or vegetables with all meals and snacks – aim for at least 5 portions a day. A portion is roughly what will fit in your hand. Try bananas, apples, pears, oranges, carrots, salad or peas.

Starchy foods

Starchy foods provide you with fibre and energy. Starchy foods should form the basis of each meal, and provide the energy required to help with a faster recovery. Fill about a third of your plate with starchy foods like bread, chapatti, breakfast cereal, pasta, rice, potatoes, etc. Where possible choose wholegrain varieties as a healthier option.

Dairy

Milk and dairy products provide the body with calcium for healthy teeth and bones. These can be included as drinks or snacks on their own such as a glass of milk or a pot of yoghurt. Alternatively, many meals and snacks contain dairy foods as a key element, for example milk on cereal, in drinks or sauces. Aim to include 2 portions a day.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other sources of protein

Protein is important for building strong muscles. Maintaining and improving your strength will help you move around after your surgery. Protein is found in lentils, pulses, tofu, eggs, meat, chicken and fish. Try to have protein with at least two meals every day, for example an egg sandwich at lunchtime and grilled salmon with dinner. After your surgery, protein will help your wounds to heal.

Suggested portions of protein include:

- a slice of meat (80g or about the size of a pack of cards)
- a fillet of fish (140g or about the size of a cheque book)
- 4 tablespoons of cooked pulses or half a standard tin of baked beans.

Fluid

Fluid is also important. You should drink 6-8 cups or glasses (1.5-2.0 litres) every day.

It is best to reduce your alcohol intake in the month before your surgery. Better still, don't drink at all during this time.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients for your body. Eating a balanced diet will provide all the vitamins and minerals that most people need, so taking extra vitamins and minerals is not normally required. If you have been diagnosed with a specific nutrient deficiency or you have any concerns, speak to your healthcare team.

Further advice

Ask to speak to a dietitian if you:

- are struggling with your appetite
- are underweight
- are very overweight
- have special dietary requirements due to health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease. You may require personalised advice to improve your nutritional intake.

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Contact information:

Dietitian.....

Nurse

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