

Department of
Nutrition & Dietetics

Eating Well Before Surgery



Importance of Adequate Nutrition Before Surgery

Having good nutrition before surgery can help to:

- Improve immunity
- Improve and speed up wound-healing
- Reduce the risk of complications post-surgery
- Have a shorter recovery time
- Improve functional status with a shorter rehabilitation time

Who is at Risk of Poor Nutrition?

1) Individuals with poor oral intake as a result of:

- Reduce in appetite
- Early satiety (feeling full after eating only a small amount of food) due to acute or chronic diseases
- Experiencing changes in taste from medications or treatment
- Nutrition-related symptoms (e.g. nausea, vomiting, bloating, diarrhoea)
- Swallowing or chewing problems
- Cognitive or mood issues such as dementia

2) Individuals with increased nutritional requirements due to medical conditions such as:

- Cancer, sepsis, trauma
- Post major surgeries

Ensuring Adequate Nutrition Before Surgery

1. A well-balanced diet

- ✓ Having a wide variety of foods from different food groups – rice and alternatives, meat and alternatives, fruits and vegetables are essential for maintaining your immunity and aiding in recovery

2. Have adequate energy and protein

- ✓ Include energy sources from bread, rice, noodles and healthy oils (e.g. olive/canola/sesame oil)
- ✓ Include protein sources such as fish, meat, chicken, tofu, eggs, beans, dhal, tempeh and nuts
- ✓ Choose high protein foods for snacks (e.g. soya bean milk, egg sandwiches, meat buns and tuna puffs)
- ✓ Try to include high protein drinks (e.g. milk, soy milk and yoghurt drinks) between meals

3. Have small frequent meals throughout the day if you are unable to tolerate regular sized meals

- ✓ Have six small meals instead of the usual three large meals
- ✓ Eat more when your appetite is good (e.g. some people eat better in the morning)

4. Fortify your foods to improve the nutritional quality of your food

- ✓ Add sesame oil, fish/meat/egg/ tofu/ braised peanuts into your porridge
- ✓ Put a thicker layer of spread (margarine/peanut butter) onto bread and biscuits

Ensuring Adequate Nutrition Before Surgery

5. Manage nutrition-related symptoms

- ✓ If you experience nausea/vomiting/bloating/diarrhoea, speak to your doctor for medication(s) to relieve these symptoms
- ✓ Avoid strong cooking smells, overly oily and/or sweet foods if you experience nausea/vomiting
- ✓ Try soft foods or blend your meals if swallowing is difficult
- ✓ Ensure adequate hydration and decrease fibre intake (e.g. fruits and vegetables) if you experience diarrhoea

6. Monitor your weight and oral intake leading up to the surgery

- ✓ Aim to maintain your weight prior to surgery unless otherwise advised by your doctor/dietitian

Other Dietary Considerations

Oral nutrition supplements (ONS) may be recommended for those who are unable to eat enough to meet their nutritional requirements or maintain their weight. As there are many types of ONS formulated for different medical needs (e.g. diabetes, kidney disease, malabsorption), it is best for you to discuss this with your doctor or dietitian before starting.

Depending on the type of surgery you are undergoing, you may be advised by your doctor to avoid or decrease your intake of fibre-containing foods such as fruits, vegetables and wholegrains.

When Should You Consider Seeing a Dietitian

- You have experienced unintentional weight loss of 5% or more of your weight in the past six months
- You are eating lesser than before
(especially if you are eating less than half of your usual amount in the past five days or more)

If you have **at least one** of the above, it is recommended that you consult with a dietitian for a more detailed assessment.

A dietitian can help to:

- Evaluate your current eating habits and assess your specific dietary needs for your health conditions
- Provide personalised advice and a nutrition plan that meets your nutritional needs and goals
- Monitor and re-evaluate your nutritional progress at regular intervals to assess if your nutritional goals have been met

Clinics B2
TTSH Medical Centre, Level B2
Contact:
6357 7000 (Central Hotline)



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