The Susan F. Smith Centers for Women's Cancers
450 Brookline Avenue
Boston, MA 02215-5450

What should I eat to prepare for surgery?

Preparing for surgery often involves focusing on a healthy and well-balanced diet to support your body's healing and recovery processes. While specific dietary recommendations may vary depending on your individual circumstances and the type of surgery you are undergoing, here are some general guidelines to consider:

- Eat a Variety of Nutrient-Rich Foods: Include a wide range of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats in your diet. These foods provide essential vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber, which are important for overall health and healing.

- Prioritize Protein: Protein is crucial for tissue repair and wound healing. Include lean sources of protein in your meals, such as chicken, fish, tofu, beans, lentils, and low-fat dairy products. Aim for a balanced protein intake throughout the day.

- Increase Fiber Intake: Eating foods high in fiber, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts, can help prevent constipation, which is a common side effect of surgery and certain medications. Ensure you're getting an adequate amount of fiber daily.

- Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, to stay hydrated. Proper hydration supports overall health, helps prevent complications, and promotes optimal healing. Avoid excessive caffeine and sugary beverages.

- Moderate Sodium Intake: Excess sodium can contribute to fluid retention and increase blood pressure. Be mindful of your sodium intake by minimizing processed and packaged foods, which often contain high amounts of sodium. Instead, choose fresh, whole foods and season meals with herbs and spices.

- Limit Added Sugars and Saturated Fats: Minimize the consumption of sugary snacks, desserts, sugary drinks, and foods high in saturated fats (like fried foods, fatty meats, and full-fat dairy products). These can lead to inflammation and may hinder the healing process.

- Consider Supplements: Discuss with your healthcare provider whether you need any specific supplements, such as iron, vitamin D, or vitamin C, to support your nutritional needs before and after surgery.

- Discuss Special Dietary Needs: If you have specific dietary needs or restrictions, such as allergies, intolerances, or religious dietary requirements, communicate them to your healthcare team so they can accommodate your needs during your hospital stay.

Your clinical team can make a referral to our medical dieticians if you need further advice or assistance .

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What diet can I follow to reduce my risk of cancer recurrence?

Diet alone cannot guarantee the prevention or recurrence of cancer. However, certain dietary patterns and foods have been associated with a lower risk of cancer recurrence or improved outcomes in cancer patients. It's important to note that these findings are based on observational studies, and further research is needed to establish definitive guidelines. Here are some dietary considerations that have shown promise:

- Mediterranean Diet: The Mediterranean diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, healthy fats (such as olive oil), and moderate amounts of lean proteins like fish and poultry. This dietary pattern has been associated with a reduced risk of various types of cancer.

- Plant-Based Diet: A plant-based diet focuses on consuming predominantly plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. Plant-based diets are rich in fiber, antioxidants, and phytochemicals, which may help reduce the risk of cancer recurrence.

- Antioxidant-Rich Foods: Antioxidants help protect cells from damage caused by free radicals. Including antioxidant-rich foods in your diet, such as berries, leafy greens, cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower), citrus fruits, and nuts, may be beneficial.

- Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines), flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts, have anti-inflammatory properties. Some studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids may help reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and improve outcomes.

- Limiting Processed and Red Meats: Consumption of processed meats (such as sausages, hot dogs) and high amounts of red meat has been linked to an increased risk of various cancers. It is advisable to limit or avoid these foods and opt for lean protein sources like poultry, fish, legumes, and tofu instead.

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How can exercise reduce my risk of cancer recurrence?

Regular physical activity has been associated with a reduced risk of cancer recurrence and improved outcomes in various types of cancer. Engaging in regular exercise can provide several benefits, such as improving overall health, boosting the immune system, reducing inflammation, and helping to maintain a healthy body weight. Combining different types of exercises, not just one type, is the most effective. Consider establishing a routine matched to your ability:

- Aerobic Exercise: Aerobic activities increase your heart rate and breathing, promoting cardiovascular health and improving endurance. Examples include brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, dancing, and aerobic classes. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise per week, spread across several days.

- Strength Training: Strength training exercises help build and maintain muscle strength and endurance. It involves using resistance, such as free weights, weight machines, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises. Strength training can be performed two to three times a week, targeting all major muscle groups.

- Flexibility and Stretching Exercises: Flexibility exercises help improve range of motion, reduce muscle tension, and enhance overall mobility. Activities like yoga, Pilates, and stretching exercises can help improve flexibility and balance. Incorporate stretching exercises into your routine at least two to three times per week.

- Balance and Stability Exercises: Balance exercises help improve stability and reduce the risk of falls, which is particularly important for individuals who have undergone surgery or are at risk of osteoporosis. Examples include Tai Chi, yoga, and specific balance exercises that focus on improving stability and coordination.

- Mind-Body Exercises: Mind-body exercises, such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing techniques, can help reduce stress, improve mental well-being, and enhance overall quality of life. These practices can be incorporated into your exercise routine or performed separately.

Start gradually and listen to your body, gradually increasing the intensity and duration of your workouts as you become more comfortable. Your clinical team can make a referral to physical therapy if you need assistance .

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

BRIGHAM HEALTH
BWH BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

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What are tips for managing the symptoms of menopause?

- Stay cool: When you feel hot flashes or night sweats, try wearing loose, breathable clothing and using a fan to keep cool.
- Drink plenty of water: Staying hydrated can help with dryness and hot flashes. Drink water throughout the day to feel better.
- Eat healthy foods: Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. These foods can provide energy and support your overall health.
- Stay active: Regular exercise, like walking or dancing, can boost your mood, help with weight management, and reduce symptoms like mood swings and insomnia.
- Get enough rest: Make sure to get plenty of sleep. Establish a routine and create a calm environment to help you relax before bed.
- Manage stress: Find activities that help you relax, like reading, listening to music, or practicing deep breathing. Stress management can reduce symptoms like anxiety and irritability.
- Dress in layers: Because body temperature can fluctuate during menopause, wearing layers allows you to adjust to changes in your comfort level.
- Use lubricants: If you experience vaginal dryness, using a water-based lubricant can help make sex more comfortable.
- Seek support: Talk to friends, family, or support groups. Sharing experiences and getting support from others going through menopause can help you feel better.
- Protect your bones: Menopause can increase the risk of osteoporosis. Eat foods rich in calcium (like milk and yogurt) and vitamin D (like fatty fish and fortified foods) to support bone health.

Remember, menopause is a natural part of life, but your medical team can help with managing this transition. Your gynecology team can generate a referral to a sexual health or menopause specialist for ongoing discussions and care.