

Eating Well After a Brain Injury: A Nutrition Guide for Patients and Families

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Good nutrition plays an important role in healing after a brain injury. What you eat can support recovery, strength, thinking, and long-term health. This handout explains what to focus on and how to make nutrition manageable during recovery.

Why Nutrition Is Important

After a brain injury, the body often:

- Uses more energy than usual
- Loses muscle more easily
- Is at higher risk for weight loss or poor nutrition

Eating enough **calories and protein** helps support healing, immune function, and recovery.

Nutrition in the Early Stages of Recovery

Nutrition support should begin as soon as it is safe.

- Food may be eaten by mouth or provided through tube feeding or IV nutrition if needed
- The healthcare team chooses the safest way to meet nutrition needs

Common challenges may include:

- Poor appetite
- Nausea or feeling full quickly
- Swallowing difficulties

These challenges are common and can be managed with support from the care team.

Nutrition During Ongoing Recovery

As recovery continues, nutrition helps with:

- Maintaining muscle and strength
- Managing weight changes
- Supporting energy, mood, and thinking

Helpful strategies:

- Eat regular meals and snacks
 - Keep meals simple and familiar
 - Use reminders or alarms to remember meals
 - Ask for help with shopping or meal preparation if needed
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Foods That Support Brain and Heart Health

There is no single “miracle food,” but healthy eating patterns support recovery.

Choose more often:

- Whole grains (whole-grain bread, brown rice, oats)
- Fruits and vegetables, especially dark-colored varieties

- Healthy fats such as olive oil
- Omega-3 fats from fish, nuts, and seeds

Limit when possible:

- Sugary foods and drinks
 - Highly processed or salty foods
 - Excess caffeine if it worsens symptoms
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Special Diets and Supplements

- Some supplements (such as omega-3s) may help certain people
- Other supplements or restrictive diets may not be safe or proven
- **Do not start supplements or special diets without medical guidance**
- Vitamins should only be taken if a deficiency is found through lab testing

Always discuss supplements with your doctor or registered dietitian.

Be Careful With Nutrition Information Online

Not all nutrition advice found online is reliable.

Warning signs include:

- Personal success stories without scientific evidence
- Extreme diet rules or promises of quick cures
- Advice linked to selling products

What to do instead:

- Ask questions if something sounds too good to be true
 - Look for advice from qualified healthcare professionals
 - Work with a registered dietitian for personalized guidance
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How Family and Caregivers Can Help

Family support plays an important role in recovery.

Caregivers can help by:

- Encouraging regular meals and snacks
 - Assisting with grocery shopping and meal preparation
 - Supporting follow-up visits with healthcare providers
 - Asking to speak with a dietitian if concerns arise
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Key Takeaway

Good nutrition supports healing, strength, and long-term health after a brain injury. Small, consistent steps—combined with professional support—can make a meaningful difference.

If you have questions about nutrition, ask to speak with a registered dietitian.
