Dear Alice,

I'm about to have rotator cuff surgery and repair some torn muscle. What natural healing foods can I eat to reduce the inflammation as well as increase the speed of healing of the muscle??

Answer

Dear Reader,

Kudos to you for planning ahead and making your health a priority! Surgery can be stressful on the body, but having a pre-operational plan that includes nutritional considerations may help improve patient outcomes. Proper nutrition before surgery is associated with decreased hospital stays, lower infection rates, lower readmission rates, and reduced complications. Eating healthy foods not only provides the body with energy and macronutrients for tissue repair, but also helps to control inflammatory processes and improve the body's immune response. Certain special populations may be advised to pay particular attention to their nutrition before operations in order to maximize recovery, including folks who already have inflammatory diseases, abnormal tissue growths (neoplasms), metabolic diseases including obesity, poor access to adequate nutrition, decreased muscle mass from aging or poor conditioning, or digestive tract issues. So, what foods are good to consider before and after surgery? Here's a list of a few that have been shown to help:

- **Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids** [2]: Sources such as leafy greens, flaxseeds, flaxseed oil, walnuts, and fish may help in the reduction of inflammation. Though these types of fatty acids may be advised, it may be a good idea to avoid foods that contain omega-6 fatty acids and foods high in saturated fats because they may play a role in promoting inflammation.
- **High-fiber foods** [3] may help alleviate constipation that can occur after surgery or as a result of medication. Whole grains, fruits, and veggies are good sources of fiber.
- **Soy** [4] products are anti-inflammatory and high in protein, which aids in muscle regeneration. Some tasty options include tempeh, tofu, miso, and soybeans.
- **Honey**: this sweet nectar may have immune-boosting properties and anti-inflammatory effects.
- **Foods rich in vitamin C, vitamin D** [5], **calcium** [6], and **zinc**: Vitamin C and zinc can help aid in the repair of wounds and soft tissues. Good sources of vitamin C can be found in strawberries, kiwis, baked potatoes, broccoli, and bell peppers. Zinc is a
mineral that's found mostly in animal foods, but is also found in whole grain products, beans, peas, and nuts. Vitamin D and calcium are valuable nutrients to have in your diet in order to support healthy bones; the richest sources of each of these can be found in dairy products such as milk and yogurt, but look to other fortified foods as well to get your fix.

- **Protein**: Quality protein options support wound healing, muscle building, bone health, and a strong immune system. These can come from both animal and non-animal sources (for those vegans and vegetarians out there).

In addition to incorporating nutrient-rich foods into your diet, it's a good idea to stay hydrated, get plenty of rest, and practice self-care as your body heals. Recovery is a process and it may take time before your appetite returns to normal, for your discomfort level to decrease, and you feel like yourself again. Planning your meals in advance may simplify the process and help you stick to a healthy and supportive eating plan. As part of taking a holistic approach to getting back on your feet, you may also want to work with a team of health care providers, which may include involving a primary care provider, registered dietician, physical or occupational therapist before, during, and after surgery.

Best of luck!

Alice!

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**Resources**

- Medical Services (Morningside)
- Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside)
- get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside)
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- Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC)

Published date:
- Dec 24, 2010

Last reviewed on:
- Feb 26, 2016
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