

Healthy Eating After a Stroke



Eating well after a stroke is key to your recovery. Choosing healthy foods can boost your energy level for therapy, exercise and your favorite activities.

Choosing healthy foods

Healthy eating will help you control your weight and blood pressure. Both are crucial to prevent another stroke and stay well. Ask your doctor to arrange a visit with a registered dietitian. A dietitian can teach you how to prepare and plan healthy meals.

- Eat a variety of foods each day.
- Have a rainbow of color on your plate.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Follow any advice given to you by your doctor or dietitian, such as eating less fat to lose weight or reducing your salt intake.

Lost your appetite?

Many stroke survivors don't feel as hungry as they used to and forget to eat during the day.

- Try eating smaller meals throughout the day.
- Attractive, tasty and pleasant-smelling foods may stimulate your appetite.
- Plan at least three meals per day plus snacks to maintain your health and energy.
- Eat high-calorie foods in your meal first.
- Sometimes poor appetite is caused by depression. Your appetite is likely to improve once depression is treated.
- Walk or do light exercise to stimulate your appetite.

Too tired to eat or cook?

Meal planning, grocery shopping and cooking require a lot of energy. Planning ahead can help you get the nutrition you need.

- Eat your biggest meal early in the day.
- Look for pre-washed, pre-cut fruits and vegetables at the grocery store.
- Ask family members and friends to make healthy meals that you can store in the refrigerator or freezer.
- If preparing and eating three main meals a day takes too much energy, try eating six smaller meals instead.
- Many communities offer a "Meals on Wheels" program. Check with your local social services to see how you can get healthy meals delivered to your home.
- Senior centers also offer healthy, low-cost meals. Check your local newspaper for locations, times and menus.



(continued on back)

Challenges when eating

It's hard to eat healthy if you have trouble swallowing, chewing or using eating utensils.

Swallowing or chewing problems

Stroke can weaken or paralyze muscles that help us swallow or chew. In fact, 40 to 60 percent of stroke survivors have trouble swallowing. Talk to your doctor if you:

- Cough or sputter frequently
- Have an unusually husky voice or feel the need to clear your throat often
- Experience food and saliva escaping from your mouth or nose when you eat

If you have difficulty swallowing or chewing:

- Cut foods into smaller pieces
- Use a blender or food processor to puree foods
- Choose soft foods such as cooked cereal, mashed potatoes, eggs, cottage cheese, applesauce, and canned fruits or soups
- Thicken liquids to keep them from going down the wrong pipe. Use natural thickeners such as tapioca, flour, instant potato flakes, oats or matzo meal.



Swallowing is complex and requires 25 different muscles. You may require instruction in exercising these muscles or learning new ways of swallowing. While most people recover quickly, sometimes a feeding tube is needed.

Eating utensils

After your stroke, you may have trouble grasping utensils. Take advantage of special products that can help you, including:



- Flatware with larger handles or Velcro straps that can be easier to grasp
- Knives with curved blades that help you cut foods with one hand
- Plate guards to help keep food on the plate when using one hand
- Rubberized pads under the plate to help keep it from sliding around

Other resources

- If you wear dentures, have your dentist check their fit at least every year. Loose dentures can interfere with chewing and swallowing. Medicines, mouth dryness and other medical changes can also affect denture fit.
- Liquid supplements, such as Ensure[®], can be used to supplement your diet.
- If you are diabetic, be aware that stroke can change your ability to eat the same foods or give yourself insulin shots. Talk to your doctor about how best to manage your condition.
- Get more information from the National Stroke Association by visiting www.stroke.org or calling 1(800) STROKES (1-800-787-6537).
- Join a stroke support group.