Patient & Family Guide

2025

Prehab: Eating Well Before Surgery



Prehab: Eating Well Before Surgery

What is prehab?

Prehab (prehabilitation) is what you do to get ready for surgery. This includes:

- Healthy eating:
 - > What to eat before and after your surgery
 - > How to manage any symptoms you may have
- Physical activity:
 - Exercising regularly
 - Getting your home ready for after your surgery
- Healthy lifestyle:
 - Lowering and managing tobacco and alcohol use
- Managing stress:
 - Learning how to cope with change
 - Making a financial (money) plan if you will be off work
 - Finding benefits and medication coverage, if needed

How can healthy eating help?

- Healthy eating, especially for 7 to 10 days before your surgery, can help you:
 - Feel stronger and have more energy
 - Be discharged from the hospital sooner
 - > Have a lower risk of infection after surgery
 - Heal and recover faster
 - Lower your risk of complications from surgery
- Making small changes each day will help you to get stronger and healthier.
- You can keep using the skills you learn before your surgery to help you recover and stay healthy after your surgery.

What is healthy eating for prehab?

- Your body needs nutrition to help it get ready for surgery. This includes:
 - > Protein
 - → Iron
 - > Omega-3 fats

Protein

- Protein helps you build and keep muscle.
- Foods that come from animals and plants both have protein. Animal foods are higher in protein than plant foods.
- Animal-based protein foods include:
 - > Eggs
 - > Fish, shellfish
 - > Poultry (like chicken, turkey)
 - Meat (beef, pork) and wild meat (like venison)
 - > Dairy products (like milk, cheese, Greek or Icelandic yogurt)
 - Protein powder made from whey or casein (both found in cow's milk)
- Plant-based protein foods include:
 - Soy foods (like tofu, fortified soy drinks)
 - > Beans, peas, and lentils
 - > Nuts and seeds
 - > Protein powder made from soy, rice, or hemp
- To learn more about protein powders, see **Protein supplements** on page 3.

Examples:

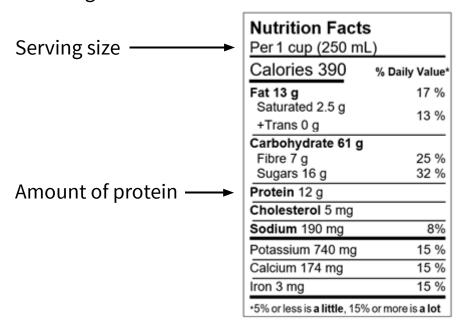
Food	Amount	Grams (g) of protein (approximate)
Fish, poultry, or meat (cooked)	75 g (2½ oz)	21
Greek yogurt	175 ml (¾ cup)	14
Tofu	150 g or 175 ml (¾ cup)	12
Beans, peas, or lentils (cooked)	120 ml (½ cup)	9
Eggs	1 large	6
Cheese	33 g (1 oz)	7
Cow's milk	250 ml (1 cup)	9
Peanut butter (natural)	30 ml (2 Tbsp)	8
Fortified soy drink	250 ml (1 cup)	7

How much protein do I need?

Eat 25 to 30 grams of protein 4 times a day (morning, noon, evening, night). Your body uses protein better if you eat it throughout the day instead of all at once.

How do I know how much protein a food has?

Reading food labels can help you compare foods and make healthier choices.
 Check the label for a Nutrition Facts table. This will tell you how many grams of protein are in 1 serving.



Protein supplements

• Protein supplements come in different forms:

> Powders

→ Bars

> Drinks

> Puddings

 If you are not getting enough protein, a protein supplement can help. Look for protein supplements with at least 10 g protein per serving and that are made from:

Whey

Casein

A mix of "plant-based" or "vegan" proteins

Soy

- Some protein powders are not flavoured. You can blend these into smoothies, or add them to mashed potatoes, cream soups, puddings, or yogurt.
- Store-brand protein powders usually have the same nutrition as brand name products, but may cost less.

Iron

- Your body needs iron to carry the oxygen in your blood throughout your body.
 Without enough iron, you will get tired more easily and be less able to fight infections.
- Many foods that are high in iron are also high in protein.
- Animal-based iron foods include:
 - Oysters
 - > Poultry (like chicken, duck, turkey)
- Meat (like beef, bison, elk, goat, lamb, pork, wild boar)

> Egg yolks

- Plant-based iron foods include:
 - > Beans
 - Lentils

- Chickpeas
- > Firm tofu

If you think you are not getting enough iron, talk to your health care team. **Do not** take an iron supplement before talking to your health care team.

Omega-3 fats

- Omega-3 fats are healthy fats. Our bodies cannot make omega-3 fats, so it is important to get them from food.
- Omega-3 fats help your body:
 - > Prevent blood clots
 - Lower blood pressure
 - > Lower inflammation (swelling)
 - Keep blood vessels (arteries) from getting stiff

- All fish have some omega-3 fats, but fatty fish have the most. These include:
 - Arctic char
 - Mackerel
 - → Sardines

- Herring
- > Salmon
- > Trout

Fish is also high in protein.

- Plant-based omega-3 fat foods include:
 - Oils (like canola, flax, soybean, walnut)
 - Walnuts

- > Seeds (like chia, flax, hemp)
- Soybean products (like tempeh, tofu)

For more information:

Community Health Teams - Healthy Eating

https://library.nshealth.ca/CommunityHealthTeams/HealthyEating

What are your questions?
Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

If you have questions or concerns, talk to your health care team. They may refer you to a dietitian, if needed.

Questions for my health care team:			

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here: www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: Call 811 or visit: https://811.novascotia.ca

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