

Prehab: Eating Well Before Surgery

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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.

Serving size	→	Nutrition Facts
		Per 1 cup (250 mL)
		Calories 390 % Daily Value*
		Fat 13 g 17 %
		Saturated 2.5 g 13 %
		+Trans 0 g
		Carbohydrate 61 g
		Fibre 7 g 25 %
		Sugars 16 g 32 %
Amount of protein	→	Protein 12 g
		Cholesterol 5 mg
		Sodium 190 mg 8%
		Potassium 740 mg 15 %
		Calcium 174 mg 15 %
		Iron 3 mg 15 %
		*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot

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
 - › Soy
 - › A mix of “plant-based” or “vegan” proteins

- 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)
 - › Egg yolks
 - › Meat (like beef, bison, elk, goat, lamb, pork, wild boar)
- 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:

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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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