



## Eating Plan After Stroke

A stroke causes damage to the brain cells, which can affect your ability to walk, talk, and even eat. The impact of a stroke is different for everyone, and so is recovery. A good nutrition plan is important for your recovery. It can also lower your risk of another stroke.

If you have difficulty chewing and swallowing your food, a dietitian or your stroke care team can help so that you can enjoy eating healthy foods.

### What are tips for following this plan?

#### **Reading food labels**

- Choose foods that have less than 300 milligrams (mg) of sodium per serving. Limit your sodium intake to less than 1,500 mg per day.
- Avoid foods that have saturated fat and *trans* fat.
- Choose foods that are low in cholesterol. Limit the amount of cholesterol you eat each day to less than 200 mg.
- Choose foods that are high in fiber. Eat 20–30 grams (g) of fiber each day.
- Avoid foods with added sugar. Check the food label for ingredients such as sugar, corn syrup, honey, fructose, molasses, and cane juice.

#### **Shopping**

- At the grocery store, buy most of your food from areas near the walls of the store. This includes:
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables.
  - Dry grains, beans, nuts, and seeds.
  - Fresh seafood, poultry, lean meats, and eggs.
  - Low-fat dairy products.
- Buy whole ingredients instead of prepackaged foods.
- Buy fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables from local farmers markets.
- Buy frozen fruits and vegetables in resealable bags.

#### **Cooking**

- Prepare foods with very little salt. Use herbs or salt-free spices instead.
- Cook with heart-healthy oils, such as olive, avocado, canola, soybean, or sunflower oil.
- Avoid frying foods. Bake, grill, or broil foods instead.
- Remove visible fat and skin from meat and poultry before eating.
- Modify food textures as told by your health care provider.

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## Meal planning

- Eat a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables. Make sure one-half of your plate is filled with fruits and vegetables at each meal.
- Eat fruits and vegetables that are high in potassium, such as:
  - Apples, bananas, oranges, and melon.
  - Sweet potatoes, spinach, zucchini, and tomatoes.
- Eat fish that contain heart-healthy fats (*omega-3 fats*) at least twice a week. These include salmon, tuna, mackerel, and sardines.
- Eat plant foods that are high in omega-3 fats, such as flaxseeds and walnuts. Add these to cereals, yogurt, or pasta dishes.
- Eat several servings of high-fiber foods each day, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans.
- **Do not** put salt at the table for meals.
- When eating out at restaurants:
  - Ask the server about low-salt or salt-free food options.
  - Avoid fried foods. Look for menu items that are grilled, steamed, broiled, or roasted.
  - Ask if your food can be prepared without butter.
  - Ask for condiments, such as salad dressings, gravy, or sauces to be served on the side.
- If you have difficulty swallowing:
  - Choose foods that are softer and easier to chew and swallow.
  - Cut foods into small pieces and chew well before swallowing.
  - Thicken liquids as told by your health care provider or dietitian.
- Let your health care provider know if your condition does not improve over time. You may need to work with a speech therapist to re-train the muscles that are used for eating.

## General recommendations

- Involve your family and friends in your recovery, if possible. It may be helpful to have a slower meal time and to plan meals that include foods everyone in the family can eat.
- Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day, and floss once a day. Keeping a clean mouth can help you swallow and can also help your appetite.
- Drink enough water each day to keep your urine pale yellow. If needed, set reminders or ask your family to help you remember to drink water.
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than 1 drink a day for nonpregnant women and 2 drinks a day for men. One drink equals 12 oz of beer, 5 oz of wine, or 1½ oz of hard liquor.

## Summary

- Following this eating plan can help in your stroke recovery and can decrease your risk for another stroke.
- Let your health care provider know if you have problems with swallowing. You may need to work with a speech therapist.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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## Get help right away if you have:

- ▲ A sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- ▲ Nausea or vomiting occurring with another symptom
- ▲ Sudden weakness or numbness of your face, arm or leg, especially on one side of your body
- ▲ Sudden trouble walking or difficulty moving your arms or legs
- ▲ Sudden confusion