

Nutrition for the Injured Athlete

Athlete Scenario

After years of working towards the starting quarterback position, I recently tore my ACL. As my thoughts shift to surgery and rehabilitation, I am concerned about weight gain. Are there any changes I can make to my diet to enhance injury recovery and ensure my weight stays in check?

Nutrition Goals for an Injured Athlete:

- Be consistent! Eating and drinking regularly throughout the day aids in tissue repair, bone health, and immune function.
- Consume lean protein throughout the day for optimal healing (up to 2.0 g/kg of body weight).
- Choose a recovery meal/snack of a mix of whole grains and lean protein within 30 minutes after rehab sessions.

Calorie Balance:

- Don't stop eating for fear of weight gain. Consuming too little energy may delay the healing process.
- Make your calories count. Limit foods and fluids with empty calories such as added sugars.

Nutrients that Heal:

- Protein promotes healing: low-fat Greek or regular yogurt, beans, fish, poultry, lean meats, & egg whites.
- Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids may reduce inflammation and swelling, speeding recovery: salmon, mackerel (Pacific and Atlantic), and sardines.
- Vitamin C promotes immune function and supports collagen synthesis, aiding in tissue repair and wound healing: citrus, strawberries, tomatoes, kiwi and cantaloupe.
- Vitamin A aids in cell growth and development: sweet potatoes, carrots, papaya, and red bell peppers.
- Zinc is involved in wound healing and immune function: almonds, sunflower seeds, beef, seafood, and pork.
- Calcium and vitamin D are essential for bone development and repair. High-calcium foods include dairy products, fortified foods, leafy greens, and sardines. Vitamin D can be made naturally from sunlight and is found in fatty fish, egg yolks and fortified foods (e.g. soy milk).

Written by SCAN registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN) to provide nutrition guidance. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. For personalized nutrition plans contact a SCAN sports dietitian or Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) by accessing "Find a SCAN Dietitian" at www.scandpg.org



Tips to Take With You

1. A variety of whole foods is preferable to consuming supplements.
2. Don't skip meals! You need energy to heal so don't cut your calories short. Evenly spaced meals and snacks throughout your day will maximize healing.
3. Consult with a sports registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) to address individual goals and adjusted needs when recovering from an injury.

Contact SCAN

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