

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. I want to heal from my injury as effectively as possible. Are there any changes I can make to my diet to optimize injury recovery and ensure my weight stays in check?

Nutrition Goals for an Injured Athlete:

- Limit high-sugar and/or high-fat foods (calorie-dense foods) as a method to balance calories to match your reduced physical activity.
- Promote healing by maintaining calorie intake and consuming foods with a concentrated amount of nutrients (nutrient-dense foods), including lean protein, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat or fat-free dairy.
- Increase intake of nutrients that are important for tissue repair, bone health, and immune function.

Calorie Balance:

- Reduce your portions of carbohydrates such as bread, pasta, and potatoes when you are less active and substitute with fruits and vegetables.
- Drink more water and limit sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda, sports drinks, and juices.

Nutrients that Heal:

- Protein promotes healing (Greek or regular low-fat yogurt, beans, fish, poultry, lean meats)
- Omega-3 fatty acids may help reduce inflammation and speed recovery (walnuts, soy foods, ground flax seeds and fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines)
- Vitamin C aids tissue repair, wound healing, and promotes positive immune function (citrus fruits, strawberries, tomatoes, peppers, kiwi, melons)
- Vitamin A helps promote cell growth and development (sweet potatoes, carrots, papaya, bell peppers)
- Zinc, a trace mineral, is involved with wound healing and immune function (almonds, seeds, beef, seafood)
- Calcium and vitamin D are essential for bone development and repair. Both vitamins can be found in low-fat dairy products and fortified foods such as: cereal, tofu, leafy greens, cold-water fish and eggs. Skin exposure to sunlight (in moderation) is also an excellent source of vitamin D.

Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs). A key to optimal recovery from your injury is developing a nutrition plan that meet the demands of your rehabilitation and busy schedule. **A SCAN registered dietitian (RD)** is the food and nutrition professional best qualified to help you design a nutrition plan tailored to your health and performance needs. Check with your athletic department or student health services or go to www.scandpg.org and click on Find a SCAN RD.



Tips to Take With You

1. Replace calorie-dense foods with nutrient-dense foods. Plan ahead to make sure these substitutions are always available.
2. Include protein-rich foods at meals and snacks to aid in healing. Incorporate cottage cheese to breakfast, beans for lunch, grilled fish for dinner, and nuts and Greek yogurt for snacks.
3. Consult a sports RDN for addressing your nutritional concerns when recovering from an injury.

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