

Nutrition After Cervical Spine Surgery

A balanced, healthy diet is an important part of recovery after cervical spine surgery. Choosing the right foods can help promote healing, reduce complications, improve energy levels, and support overall recovery. Below you will find specific nutrients to focus on along with a chart on recommended foods to help ease your recovery.



Key Nutrition for Your Diet After Surgery

Get Enough Protein

- Protein is essential for tissue repair, wound healing, and maintaining muscle strength during recovery. Good Sources of Protein:

Animal Proteins	Plant-Based Proteins
✓ Beef ✓ Pork ✓ Chicken ✓ Turkey ✓ Fish and seafood ✓ Eggs ✓ Dairy (Milk, Cheese, Yogurt, cottage cheese)	✓ Beans ✓ Lentils ✓ Peas ✓ Tofu ✓ Tempeh
Protein Supplements: alternative way to increase overall protein intake Ready-to-drink options include: ✓ Ensure®/Boost®/generic versions (i.e. Equate® brand, etc) ✓ Fairlife® ✓ Premier Protein® ✓ Pure Protein® ✓ Orgain® ✓ OWYN® ✓ Quest® ✓ Muscle Milk® Protein powders include: ✓ Whey® protein ✓ Orgain® Protein Powder ✓ Isopure® ✓ Vital Proteins® Mix protein powder with milk or a milk alternative or blend into smoothies with soft fruit.	

Eat Enough Fiber

Fiber helps:

- Prevent constipation
- Promote easier bowel movements
- Reduce straining
- Support digestive health

Many high-fiber foods are also rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that aid in healing.

High-Fiber foods

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Beans and legumes
- Nut butters
- Whole grains

Choose Foods That Are Easy to Swallow

Some people experience temporary swallowing difficulty after cervical spine surgery. Consider choosing foods that are soft, moist, and bite sized to ease swallowing difficulty.

A good rule of thumb:

- Foods should easily break apart with the side of a fork.
- Pieces should be no larger than the width of your fork.

Avoid:

- Sticky foods
- Chewy foods
- Crunchy foods

Hydration

Hydration helps with inflammation, easier bowel movements, and nutrient absorption. Dehydration can slow recovery and cause fatigue. Aim to drink fluids throughout the day unless your healthcare provider has given you fluid restrictions.

In the chart below, you will find foods from each food group that are recommended following cervical spine surgery.

Food Group	Foods recommended
Grains	• Hot cereals (oatmeal, cream of wheat, cream of rice) • Soft Pastas (avoid larger pastas such as spaghetti/fettucine; keep pieces no larger than 1.5 cm x 1.5 cm) • Soft breads • Couscous • Quinoa • Mashed potatoes • Baked Sweet potato
Proteins	<u>Animal Proteins:</u> Cooked, moist, soft, and tender • Eggs or egg substitutes (soft pieces such as hard-boiled cut up or scrambled) • Red meat (ground or braised/small pieces) ○ Beef ○ Pork ○ lamb • Poultry ○ skinless chicken or turkey ○ Ground chicken or turkey • Seafood, including fish ○ Any soft white fish ○ Salmon ○ Herring ○ sardines ○ shrimp, lobster, clams, and scallops; should be soft enough to break into bite sized pieces easy to swallow <u>Plant based Proteins:</u> • Soy base (such as tofu or tempeh) • Veggie burgers or another plant-based burger (chopped) • Legumes (with soft skins/shells) ○ Beans ○ Lentils ○ Peas <u>Other source:</u>

	• Protein shakes/smoothies ○ type of protein ingredient: whey protein, casein protein, pea protein or other plant-based proteins (refer to page 1 for examples of protein supplements/substitutes)
Fruits	• Raspberries, strawberries • Avocados • Bananas • Diced, canned peaches or pears • Applesauce • Soft, diced melon
Vegetables	• Green peas • Sweet potatoes (no skin) • Pureed vegetables • Soft, diced, steamed green beans • Soft, diced, cooked carrots • Cooked, diced zucchini/summer squash
Dairy	• Smooth yogurt • Cottage cheese • Milk • Soft Cheese (These foods are also good sources of protein)

Helpful recovery Tips:

- ✓ Include a source of protein at every meal and snack.
- ✓ Choose soft, moist foods if swallowing is uncomfortable. If soft foods become troublesome contact your doctor for further assistance, you may need to see a Speech Language pathologist to assist in swallowing exercises.
- ✓ Eat smaller, more frequent meals if your appetite is decreased.
- ✓ Stay well hydrated throughout the day.
- ✓ Increase fiber gradually and drink plenty of fluids to help prevent constipation, especially if you are taking pain medications.

Sample Meal ideas:

Breakfast	• Oatmeal with yogurt and berries • Scrambled eggs with soft bread • Protein smoothie with banana and whey protein
Lunch	• Chicken salad on soft bread • Lentil soup with soft crackers • Cottage cheese with peaches
Dinner	• Baked salmon with mashed potatoes and cooked carrots • Ground turkey with rice and steamed zucchini • Soft tofu stir-fry with Quinoa
Snacks	• Yogurt • Cottage cheese • Applesauce • Protein shake • Banana • Soft cheese and crackers

**Reminder:**

Good nutrition is one of the best ways to support your body's healing after surgery. If swallowing problems persist, your appetite remains poor, or you are unable to meet your nutrition needs, contact your healthcare provider or registered dietitian for additional guidance.