

Diet after stroke

What you need to know

- › After a stroke it might be harder to get all the nutrients you need.
- › Your speech pathologist can recommend strategies to help you eat and drink safely.
- › Your dietitian can help make sure you are getting adequate nutrition.
- › Healthy eating can improve your health and reduce your risk of having another stroke.

About poor nutrition

After a stroke, you may have:

- › Problems using your arm or hand, making it difficult to eat and drink.
- › Problems with memory and thinking, which might mean you forget to eat and drink.
- › Loss of appetite – you may not feel hungry.
- › Swallowing problems, which are also called dysphagia.

These difficulties may make it difficult to get all the nutrients you need. This can slow down your recovery.

If you have problems with your arm or hand, or with your memory and thinking, an occupational therapist can help with aids and with strategies to help you remember. If you have dysphagia, a speech pathologist can recommend strategies to help you eat and drink safely. You may need food and drinks with a different consistency.

Improving nutrition

A dietitian can help make sure you are getting adequate nutrition. This may mean having particular types of foods and drinks, eating more or less food and taking nutritional supplements.

Guidelines for healthy eating

The Australian Dietary Guidelines provide information about healthy eating for everybody.

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day:

- › Plenty of vegetables of different types and colours, legumes and beans.
- › Fruit.
- › Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and high fibre varieties such as breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley.
- › Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes and beans.
- › Milk, yoghurt, cheese and their alternatives – mostly reduced fat.

And drink plenty of water.

Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugars:

- › Limit foods high in saturated fat such as biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.
- › Limit foods which contain mostly saturated fats such as butter, cream, cooking margarine, coconut oil and palm oil.
- › Limit foods and drinks containing added salt.
- › Limit foods and drinks containing added sugars such as confectionery, sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy drinks and sports drinks.

Healthy eating after stroke

Fruit and vegetables contain antioxidants, which can help reduce damage to blood vessels. They also contain potassium which can help control blood pressure.

The fibre in fruit vegetables can lower cholesterol. Folate – which is found in green leafy vegetables – may reduce the risk of stroke. Wholegrains and cereals also contain fibre and folate.

Dairy foods are another source of potassium, along with calcium, which can also help control blood pressure. Alternatives to dairy include calcium-enriched soy or rice milks. Other sources of calcium include fish with bones, almonds and tofu.

Things to limit after stroke are:

Salt. Too much salt can raise your blood pressure. Read labels and choose lower salt options. Don't add salt when cooking or at the table. Use herbs and spices to increase flavour instead. If you reduce your intake gradually, your taste buds will adjust in a few weeks.

Sugar. Too much sugar can damage blood vessels. Read labels and choose lower sugar options. Even foods you may not think of as sugary can have added sugar.

Saturated fats. These cause high cholesterol. Eat mostly polyunsaturated and monounsaturated oils and spreads. Try nut butters or avocado.

Alcohol. Drinking alcohol increases your risk of having another stroke. Your doctor can give you advice on alcohol.

Getting help

StrokeLine provides advice on stroke prevention, treatment and recovery. StrokeLine's allied health professionals can help you find the support and services you need.

Call **1800 787 653** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, AEST (Australian Eastern Standard Time)

Email strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au

EnableMe can help with your stroke recovery and with your life after stroke. Visit enableme.org.au

Make sure your dietitian is an Accredited Practising Dietitian. Contact:

Dietitians Association of Australia
1800 812 942 daa.asn.au

Australian Dietary Guidelines
eatforhealth.gov.au

About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

 strokefoundation.org.au

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