

Good nutrition is important so that your body can function well and many health issues including pain can actually be improved by a good diet! There is a link between the food you eat and your pain. This can be due to the type of foods you eat, your bodyweight or a combination of the two.

The type of food you eat can contribute to the development of inflammation in your body and there is growing evidence to support the fact that some foods actually work to reduce inflammation and in this way can help to reduce pain. Being smart about your choice of foods can help to reduce your pain and good nutrition is an important tool in your pain toolkit! Also, being either overweight or underweight places additional stress on your body, can add to strain on joints and muscles, put your skin at risk, and can contribute to your overall experience of pain.

After a spinal cord injury your body's nutrition needs change and in many ways, good nutrition becomes even more important. A good diet will help you stay healthy, keep your skin in good condition, improve bladder and bowel function, maintain a healthy weight and additionally, can help to reduce your pain!

WHAT NUTRIENTS DO WE NEED?

Food gives us the key nutrients to drive all of our body functions and processes. A body without nutrients would be like a car without fuel – it just wouldn't work!

Referring to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, eating a good range of foods from the five food groups each day, can supply your body with the nutrients it needs to thrive.

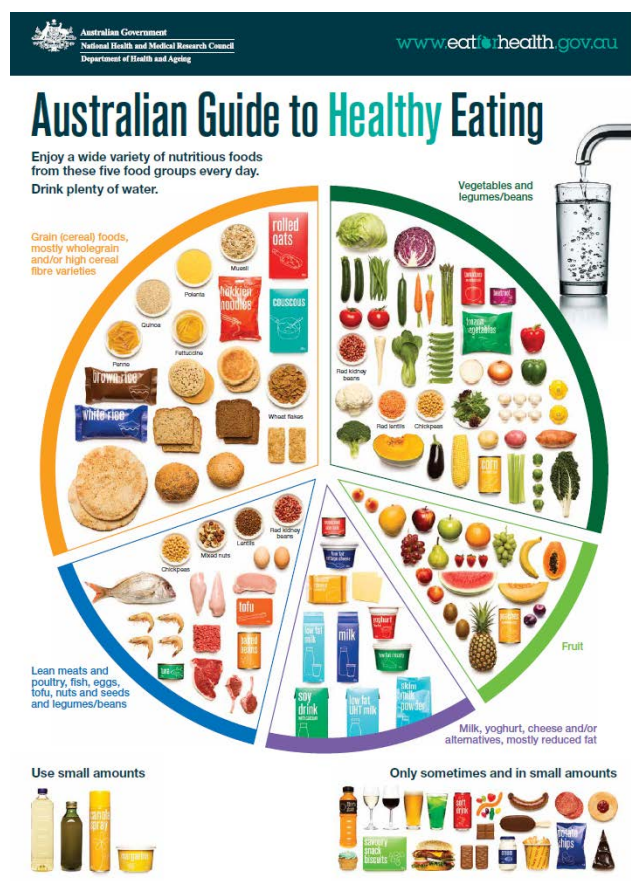
The five food groups are:

1. **Vegetables**
2. **Proteins**
3. **Grains**
4. **Fruits**
5. **Dairy**

You can do something about your pain by changing the food you eat!

To learn more about the five food groups and how to achieve a healthy balanced diet visit:

www.eatforhealth.gov.au



As with all areas of science and medicine, research evidence is constantly building and increasing our understanding of how the body functions. Research is starting to show that foods can either contribute to the development of inflammation in the body or alternatively have an anti-inflammatory effect. Foods high in Omega 3 fatty acids appear to reduce inflammation in the body. These essential fatty acids bind to red blood cell membranes and reduce the sensitivity of nerves to pain stimulus, help to keep nerves healthy and improve cardiovascular health. It is important to ensure that you have adequate omega 3s in your diet from sources such as oily fish or walnuts. Speak to your doctor or dietitian regarding recommended serving sizes and/or supplementation.

Fats are high in calories and certainly, not all fats are good for you. Trans-fats such as those in processed food and saturated fats like the white fat on meat or deep fried takeaways have minimal nutritional value, are high in calories and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. These poor quality fats are best avoided, and swap them for healthier choices wherever you can.

SCI, Medications and Bowel function

SCI affects your bowel function and often a strict routine is needed to keep your bowel function at its best. It is important to be aware that many pain medications also have an effect on your gut and can lead to constipation. The combination of slowed bowel motility from your SCI and opioid medication adding to constipation problems increases risk of developing severe bowel complications. It is recommended that you keep a bowel chart or record of your daily bowel function. If you are taking opioid medications, or if you have concerns that your pain medication may be affecting your bowel function, it is recommended that you follow up with your doctor as soon as possible.

Maintaining a healthy weight

I keep my weight stable and eat very healthy food. Gaining a few kilos can be the difference between me transferring independently or needing assistance.

Joan, C8 Tetraplegia

Maintaining a healthy weight is very important after SCI and it is also an important part of your pain management program. Gaining weight can make you feel lethargic and can aggravate many painful conditions such as arthritis; low back pain; shoulder, wrist and elbow pain and even carpal tunnel syndrome. Being overweight can cause problems with mobility, transfers, muscle and joint strain, the suitability and fit of your mobility equipment and eventually being overweight could impact upon independence in daily tasks.

Being underweight can also be a risk to your health however. If you are underweight your skin is at high risk due to reduced padding of bony prominences, reduced rate of healing of any existing pressure areas, reduced energy and may interfere with your activity levels. All of these factors can impact upon your overall health and well-being, and can affect your experience of pain. There is a reduction of daily energy expenditure after SCI and your metabolic rate is also reduced due to paralysis of some muscles, although this is affected by things such as your level of injury, how much exercise you do and the amount of spasm you get. Speak to your doctor or accredited practicing dietitian for more information about your specific nutritional needs.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING

When you are in pain, you can feel so exhausted that the thought of shopping or cooking healthy meals can seem like too much of a hassle. Here are some healthy & helpful ideas from Joan, Joe, Peter, Sue, Anne-Marie, Donny, Mel and Michelina.

- ✓ Establish a routine for healthy eating that is easy and achievable so that you don't have to think about it too much.
- ✓ Have a plan for the days when you are having a flare up – being prepared for those bad days can really help to stay on track.
- ✓ You don't have to have all the answers when you start – just make one change and you will be amazed what a difference that makes.
- ✓ Save energy by doing your shopping online or arranging home delivery of large grocery items – be energy efficient!!
- ✓ Purchase “healthy heart tick” frozen meals for when you are too sore or fatigued to prepare food & add extra frozen veggies.
- ✓ I travel a lot for work – I have a cool-bag of healthy foods to eat while I'm on the road so I don't get fast food too often.
- ✓ When I cook I make sure I make extra and put portions in the freezer ready for another time – this always comes in handy! Actually – I'm going to defrost some vegetable soup right now!
- ✓ Cook with a friend! Make it enjoyable – food should be fun! I love to cook for my family too – good, hearty, healthy food.
- ✓ Prepare portions of raw veggies or fruit salad for snacks.
- ✓ I cook for my housemates now - they love my healthy cooking.
- ✓ Surround yourself with positive people – this helps you stay positive too!



What are 3 things I will do with my diet to improve my overall health and wellbeing, and reduce my pain?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

From the episode Pain and Nutrition – remember these key messages:

Your SHOPPING LIST should include:

- 🌀 **Fruit and Vegetables** - aim for a rainbow of colour to get the best nutrition
- 🌀 **Protein** – choose lean protein sources such as lean meat, fish, poultry, tofu or legumes
- 🌀 **Grains** - choose high quality whole grains with good fibre content & B vitamins
- 🌀 **Fruits** – choose 2 serves of fruit per day
- 🌀 **Dairy** – choose low fat dairy options

TO-DO LIST:

- 🌀 Discuss the option of Calcium, Vitamin D and Omega 3 supplements with your doctor if your dietary intake is inadequate
- 🌀 Consider referral to an accredited practicing dietitian for specialised dietary advice

Great food can look and taste great too!
This breakfast sundae of low fat milk, oats, yoghurt, apples and berries tastes as good as it looks!! Be creative with good food and enjoy the benefits of good health!!



Check out these great SCI & Nutrition resources:

<http://www.uab.edu/medicine/sci/uab-scims-information/eatright-weight-management-program>

<http://www.sci-u.ca/nutrition-2/>

http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/155185/nutrition.pdf#zoom=100

For detailed dietary advice, it is recommended that you consult an accredited practicing dietitian who can thoroughly assess your nutritional needs. Assessment will take into account things such as your level of injury, your resting metabolic rate, your exercise and activity levels, the impact of any other health issues such as pressure injuries, and your lifestyle.

For information about accredited practicing dietitians in your local area visit www.daa.asn.au