Dear Alice,

Great site which I wasn't aware of when I graduated from SIPA back in '95.

I have had spinal cord surgery for removal of a tumor. Now, a year later in continuing rehab, are there any vitamins, supplements, specific foods I should be eating to rebuild my CNS?

?Columbia Alumnus

Answer

Dear Columbia Alumnus,

Several nutrients are important in supporting a healthy central nervous system (CNS). Your best bet is to get these nutrients through food, as there is no evidence that taking large doses of nutritional supplements will speed your recovery. Key nutrients include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Action(s)</th>
<th>Good Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A</td>
<td>Helps maintain nerve cell sheaths</td>
<td>Fortified dairy products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-carotene (which is converted to vitamin A)</td>
<td>Helps maintain nerve cell sheaths</td>
<td>Spinach, dark leafy green vegetables, broccoli, deep orange fruits and veggies (apricots, cantaloupe, squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiamin</td>
<td>Supports nervous system function</td>
<td>Pork, ham, liver, whole grains, legumes (beets and peas), nuts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niacin</td>
<td>Also supports a healthy nervous system</td>
<td>Milk, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, nuts, whole grains and enriched breads and cereals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B₁₂</td>
<td>Maintains the sheath that surrounds and protects nerve fibers and promotes their normal growth</td>
<td>All animal based foods; for vegans, fortified milk or yeast grown in a vitamin B₁₂ rich environment are recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Helps form the protective covering of nerves</td>
<td>Grains, nuts, meats, seeds, some drinking water</td>
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</tbody>
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After surgery, eating properly can help with the recovery process. Obtaining adequate calories...
and protein is vital. Protein is extremely important for recuperation. Not only is it required for fighting infections, it is the backbone for repair and maintenance of many crucial tissues in the body. In addition, protein is vital for building collagen, which is necessary for scar formation.

In addition, plasma proteins, formed from dietary proteins, maintain fluid and electrolyte balance.

Other important nutrients specific to wound healing include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Good Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
<td>Citrus fruits, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, dark green vegetables, cantaloupe, strawberries, peppers, lettuce, tomatoes, potatoes, papayas, mangoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc</td>
<td>Meat, fish, poultry, beans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A person with post-surgery complications or depleted nutrition stores needs more calories and protein than s/he did before the procedure, regardless of his or her weight. A higher caloric intake also increases the need for B-vitamins. Supplements usually are not necessary since these nutrients are found in a wide array of foods.

As there are no supplements that are recommended for enhanced recovery, get your nutrients from a well-balanced eating plan, rich in a variety of fruits, veggies, legumes, whole grains, and lean proteins, such as lean meats and low-fat dairy products. Happy healing!

Alice!
Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Food Choices & Health

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Published date:
Jun 22, 2001
Last reviewed on:
Jul 21, 2015
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