

What to Eat After Stroke

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An important cornerstone of stroke prevention is eating well. Whether you're trying to prevent a second stroke or simply looking to increase your general wellness, a healthy diet is a great place to start.

Why Eating Well Matters

The 5 biggest causes of stroke are hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, central obesity, and smoking. Four out these five stroke risk factors are related to the way you eat, which is why it's so important to practice eating well.

If you want to know what to eat after stroke, just remember that there is no magic food that will make you better. Instead, a healthy, balanced diet is key. Here are 5 things to pay attention to:

1. Eat Whole Foods

When we say 'whole foods,' we're not talking about the grocery chain. Instead, we're talking about any foods that haven't been processed or were minimally processed, like fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Whole foods are bursting with nutrients that will help satisfy your body and crush those unhealthy cravings.

2. Ditch the Box

The guideline for this one is simple: Anything that comes in a box is usually full of **empty calories** that you don't need. Mac 'N Cheese, frozen pizza, cookie bites, and candy are all highly processed and lacking vital nutrients. Stick to shopping the perimeter of the store, where you can find fresh produce and lean proteins.

3. Focus on Fiber

Fiber is very important when it comes to maintaining healthy cholesterol levels and therefore reducing your risk of stroke. Try starting your morning with some steel cut oats that are **proven** to help lower cholesterol while also providing you with tons of nutrients. Or if you're looking for something more portable, prepare a smoothie out of some frozen fruit – they're also a good source fiber!

4. Get Fat from Plants

We don't want you to gain weight from plants, but we do recommend getting your dietary fats from plants. Plant-based fats like nuts and avocados are high in **monounsaturated fats**, the good kind of fat.

Animal fats like butter and lard are high in saturated fats, the artery-clogging type of fat that leads to high cholesterol. Try using animal fats in moderation and get the rest of your dietary fat from plant sources.

5. Slash Your Sodium Intake

To reduce your risk of hypertension, avoid excessive salt in the diet. If you're avoiding boxed foods, you're already on your way as most packaged goods contain way too much sodium. Always check the labels, even on things that you wouldn't suspect contain salt. And if you're looking for more advice, check out our previous post on [how to reduce your sodium intake](#).

If You Have Trouble Swallowing

Now that you know what kinds of foods to eat to prevent recurrent stroke, we'd like to discuss the kinds of food to eat if you suffer from dysphagia after stroke. **Dysphagia is a swallowing problem** that occurs when stroke impairs your ability to control your swallowing muscles. Read our article "How to Treat Swallowing Problems after Stroke", 12/31/2015.

Those who suffer from dysphagia should focus on eating soft foods to avoid choking. Also, focus on eating slowly and mindfully. Not only does this help prevent choking, but it allows you to really focus and practice swallowing. Because in order to **retrain your brain** how to use your swallowing muscles, you have to practice swallowing. Always be sure to practice safely with the presence of a caregiver just in case something goes wrong. We don't want that!

And there you have it. The best foods to eat after stroke are plant-based whole foods that are cooked with low sodium to help reduce stroke risk factors.

And if you suffer from dysphagia, make sure those foods are soft and eat them slowly.