

# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to Healthy Eating In Recovery

## Thank You

Thanks for downloading this guide to healthy eating during addiction recovery. All of us here at Meta Addiction Treatment hope this resource will be useful for you and your loved ones.

While it's easy to overlook nutrition when you're recovering from addiction, this guide shows just how critical your diet can be when you're in recovery. From overeating to hypoglycemia to organ damage, addiction can have devastating consequences on our body. When we're ready for recovery, we must also change the way we eat and think about food, too.

That's what this guide is intended to help you do. If you or a loved one are trying to get sober, investing time and effort into eating healthy can become a game-changing habit. A strong focus on diet and nutrition can also help you incorporate other healthy habits into your life, including exercise and good sleep hygiene.

We hope you'll find this guide helpful as you make healthy decisions moving forward. Remember, if you need support with your sobriety, we're always here to talk. You can reach us directly at 1-844-909-2560 or [info@metaaddictiontreatment.com](mailto:info@metaaddictiontreatment.com).

Wishing you a strong recovery,

**The team at Meta Addiction Treatment**



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## Why Do Nutrition and Diet Matter in Addiction Recovery?

Abusing alcohol and drugs can cause us to experience nutritional deficiencies that often result in an imbalanced diet. Unfortunately, when we don't consume enough vitamins, minerals, and essential amino acids, our physical strength wanes, leaving us fatigued, lethargic, and apathetic. A poor diet can also weaken our immune system, making us more susceptible to infections, viruses, and diseases. In addition,

imbalanced diets triggered by addiction can negatively impact our mental health, making us feel depressed, anxious, and overly moody. Luckily, addiction recovery programs that focus on nutrition and a balanced diet can help combat nutritional deficiencies, rebuild our physical strength, and enhance our mental health and overall wellbeing.

## How Substance Abuse Interferes With Nutrition

Using addictive substances like drugs and alcohol can negatively affect our health and nutrition in many ways. Even though each substance impairs the body differently, overall drug and alcohol use can prevent you from receiving proper nourishment and disrupt the way the body functions.



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**Typically, addictive substances cause nutritional deficiencies and poor diets by:**

**Suppressing users' appetites.** Many addictive substances, such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, ecstasy, Adderall, and alcohol, suppress users' appetites. Typically, people who use these drugs eat less as their consumption of the substance increases. In addition to that, abusing drugs and alcohol can also cause users to forget about eating altogether. Maintaining consumption of their substance of choice, rather than eating nutritionally, becomes one of their top concerns.

**Encouraging overeating.** Similarly, some substances, such as marijuana, can increase users' appetites, causing them to eat too much. Over time, this can lead to obesity and a number of health conditions caused by excess body fat.

**Triggering poor eating choices.** People under the influence of drugs and alcohol tend to eat lower quality food. This often means that they eat fast food, sweets, and junk food. As the addictive substance continues to cloud their judgement, they become even more impulsive and reckless, which almost always affects their food choices.

**Damaging vital organs.** Abusing drugs and alcohol can damage the liver, kidneys, lungs, pancreas, stomach lining, and intestines. All of these organs help the body absorb, digest, and store nutrients. When they're damaged, the body can't properly absorb nutrients, which can cause nutritional deficiencies.

**Triggering hypoglycemia.** Excessively drinking alcohol without eating can cause hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar. An imbalanced diet can also trigger hypoglycemia.

**Causing gastrointestinal issues.** Alcohol and several drugs can cause chronic issues in the gastrointestinal, or GI, tract. This stops the GI tract from effectively digesting and absorbing the nutrients in food.

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## How Do Specific Substances Affect Nutrition Levels?

Here, at Meta Addiction Treatment, we treat a variety of substance use disorders. Some of the most common addictions we treat include:

- **Alcohol**
- **Opioids**
- **Stimulants**

Here's how each of these substances can impair the body and affect our nutrition and physical health.

### Alcohol and Nutrition

Alcohol abuse harms two critical digestive organs: the liver and the pancreas. Healthy livers break down toxins such as alcohol in the body. The pancreas helps the body digest fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. Alcohol disrupts these processes, preventing the body from receiving vital nutrients.

Specifically, heavy alcohol consumption can cause severe deficiencies in the following 3 key nutrients:

- **Folic acid, which helps make healthy red blood cells**
- **Vitamin B6, which helps the body use and store energy from protein and carbohydrates**
- **Thiamine, or B1, which turns energy into food to keep the nervous system healthy**

### Opioids and Nutrition

In addition to suppressing users' appetites, opioids can cause severe constipation. As the constipation worsens, users tend to avoid eating, but the lack of fiber in their diet allows the condition to persist.

Withdrawal from opioids can also create nutritional deficiencies. Eliminating opioids such as heroin, codeine, morphine, OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin can trigger vomiting and diarrhea. Both of these conditions can deplete the body of nutrients and interfere with the body's electrolyte balance, which may lead to dehydration.

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## Stimulants and Nutrition

Stimulants can make users feel so “invincible” that they feel as though they don’t need to eat. In fact, many stimulant users “binge,” or excessively indulge, in the drug of their choice for hours or even days. During these binges, most users don’t eat or drink enough to nourish the body, which leaves them dehydrated and malnourished.

This lack of nutrition is often associated with:

- **Depression and anxiety**
- **Confusion and trouble problem-solving**
- **Irregular heart rates and rhythms**
- **Muscle deterioration**
- **Weight loss**

Regardless of the substance, people who use drugs and alcohol almost always have poor eating habits. Some users actually forget what being hungry feels like and mistake hunger for a drug or alcohol craving. When this happens, they feed the body with toxins instead of nutrients, which diminishes the immune system. Luckily, focusing on nutrition and developing a healthy, balanced diet can help restore, strengthen, and replenish the physical body.



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## How A Balanced Diet Can Support Your Recovery

Research shows that there's a close connection between substance abuse, poor nutrition, and mood. Even if you have the best intentions, trying to recover from addiction when you're malnourished can make you more vulnerable to mood swings, anxiety, a short attention span, low energy, and cravings. Fortunately, establishing a balanced diet and maintaining proper nutrition can help boost your energy and improve your mood as you recover from substance use challenges.

Following a balanced diet can also help:

- **Repair damage to your organs and tissues**
- **Reestablish proper functioning of various systems in the body**
- **Rebuild the immune system**
- **Enhance brain functionality**
- **Restore balance in the central nervous system**
- **Maintain proper metabolic functioning**
- **Improve your concentration**

Here, at Meta Addiction Treatment, we know that those in recovery need a treatment program that will equip them with the necessary elements for a healthy life. That's why we provide nutritional counseling in all of our outpatient programs. By focusing on nutrition and a balanced diet in addition to counseling and behavioral therapy, we help our clients recover their lives from the inside out. Here are a few specific ways proper nutrition and a balanced diet can benefit the recovery process.

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## The Right Nutritional Balance Can Help Improve Neuroplasticity

Addiction originates in the brain. When people abuse drugs and alcohol, the brain changes to accommodate those substances. Eventually, the brain “learns” to rely on those substances to feel “normal.” This means that the brain starts to “believe” that the mind and body need those substances in order to function properly. That’s how addiction happens.

Luckily, the brain can change again and “unlearn” those harmful associations and habits.

Doctors call the brain’s ability to change and learn new things neuroplasticity, and this concept is key to addiction recovery. Even after suffering harm from addiction, the brain can still “master” healthier habits and function more optimally. But the process of relearning healthy habits isn’t easy. Once addiction changes the brain, the mind has a harder time re-adapting to sobriety. Fortunately, proper nutrition can help enhance neuroplasticity. Here’s how.

**Carbohydrates** help the brain produce serotonin. Serotonin helps reduce cravings for drugs and alcohol. By doing this, carbohydrates allow the brain time and energy to focus on creating new neural connections that can promote healthier habits. Carbohydrates, when eaten in moderation, can also help create a stable mood and promote healthy sleep patterns.

**Amino acids** help stabilize the brain’s dopamine levels. Without these essential nutrients, individuals in recovery tend to have more severe cravings, sudden and negative mood changes, and higher levels of aggression. Dopamine also helps motivate the brain to change and plays an important role in learning and memory.

**Dietary fat** helps reduce inflammation and protect cell membranes in the brain, which helps facilitate neuroplasticity.

**Omega-3 fatty acids** also help reduce brain inflammation. In addition to that, omega-3 acids help balance the brain’s neurotransmitters, or chemical messengers. Restoring that balance helps equip the brain to change, which allows the process of neuroplasticity to create new, healthier neural connections.

**Omega-6 fatty acids** work with omega-3 acids to increase neurotransmitter functionality. This also helps to restore the brain’s balance, which helps prepare the brain to replace old neural pathways with new neural connections.

Recovery from addiction is a multifaceted process, but a balanced diet can help encourage neuroplasticity. And by changing the brain, you can, in many ways, begin to change your life.



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## A Nutrient-Rich Diet Can Help Rebuild Your Physical Health

Having a nutrient-rich diet can also help rebuild your physical health. Addiction can wreak havoc on the physical body, but proper nutrition and a balanced diet can help strengthen your body. Repairing the physical damage caused by drug

and alcohol abuse may take time, but a diet rich in amino acids, vitamins, and minerals can help you overcome any physical deficiencies you may be experiencing. Replenishing lost nutrients can also help your body heal more quickly.

## Balanced Diet Can Improve Your Mood and Mental Health

A balanced diet can also help improve your mood and mental health. Research shows that many people utilize substance abuse as a way to cope with mental health challenges. Recovering from addiction can feel like an uphill battle when you're also dealing with depression, anxiety, or any other mood disorder. Luckily, a balanced diet can greatly enhance your mental wellbeing. Consider the following research:

- According to an [article](#) published by Harvard Medical School, people who follow “traditional” diets like the Mediterranean Diet and the traditional Japanese diet show a 25 to 35% lower risk of depression than those who follow a typical “Western” diet.
- Maintaining healthy blood sugar levels can promote a positive mood and clear thinking. Foods that help maintain regular blood sugar levels often include lean meats, quinoa, low-fat yogurt, lentils, oatmeal, and raspberries.
- [Research from 2016](#) shows that diets high in processed sugar can trigger increased symptoms of depression and fatigue. The research also found that vegetables, whole fruits, and whole grains have a lower glycemic index and can help ward off depression and fatigue.
- A [2017 study](#) shows that foods and supplements high in zinc, magnesium, omega 3, and vitamins B and D3 can help improve mood, ease anxiety, and relieve depression.

Improving your mood and maintaining a positive, upbeat attitude can be the difference between an inspiring and frustrating recovery journey. Reward yourself, rebuild your strength, and uplift your spirits by eating a balanced diet and maintaining proper nutrition levels.



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## A Balanced Diet Can Help Improve Your Memory

Maintaining a balanced diet can also help enhance your memory. In addition to causing physical deterioration, addiction can cause cognitive impairment that can affect your memory. Chronic substance abuse can also increase your risk for dementia and Alzheimer's. Luckily, the proper nutrients can combat cognitive decline and help improve your memory.

According to a study published in the journal *Neurology, Psychiatry, and Brain Research*, nutrients that protect against cognitive decline and dementia include:

- **Vitamins C, D, and E**
- **Omega-3 fatty acids**
- **Flavonoids and polyphenols**

Other foods that can boost brain function include:

- **Oily fish**
- **Dark chocolate**
- **Berries**
- **Nuts and seeds**
- **Whole grains**
- **Avocados**
- **Peanuts**
- **Broccoli**
- **Kale**
- **Eggs**



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## Eating Well Can Increase Your Energy

Recovery isn't for the faint of heart. Recovering from addiction requires physical, mental, emotional, and social energy. Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol tend to leave users lethargic, fatigued, and drained. Detoxification and withdrawal symptoms can also sap your energy. Fortunately, eating a balanced diet can increase your energy.

Energy comes from the foods we eat. For the most part our energy comes from carbohydrates, protein, and fats. But the types of carbs, proteins, and fats we eat can provide us with sustainable, productive energy or temporary, fleeting energy. When you're looking to boost your energy, you should eat nutrient-rich, energy-providing foods such as:

**Complex carbohydrates**, which contain high amounts of fiber. Unlike simple carbs, complex carbohydrates take a longer time to digest in the body, which can provide you energy for longer periods of time. Complex carbs also help stabilize the body's sugar level which helps you feel satisfied longer.

**Lean proteins** provide longer-lasting energy than carbohydrates. You can find protein in meat, nuts, milk, yogurt, eggs, cheese, and tofu. Doctors typically recommend chicken, turkey, fish, lentils, and beans as excellent sources of energy.

**Fats.** Like carbs and proteins, the body needs a moderate amount of good fats such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats for energy in order to absorb vitamins and to protect the heart and brain. Avocados, seeds, nuts, and coconut and olive oils are some of the best sources of long-lasting, productive energy.

If you're serious about recovering from addiction, you need to have adequate energy for the recovery process. You can do that by:

- **Drinking 6 to 8 glasses of water each day. Dehydration can sap your energy and leave you feeling fatigued and nauseated.**
- **Eating something from each major food group at every meal.**
- **Grabbing something nutrient rich to eat every 3 to 4 hours. Skipping meals can deplete your energy.**

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## A Balanced Diet Can Help You Sleep Well

Research also shows a connection between sleep deprivation and addiction. Excessively using drugs and alcohol can disrupt healthy sleep patterns. At the same time, insomnia and poor sleeping patterns can cause individuals to turn to drugs and alcohol as a way to temporarily escape their sleep challenges. This makes sleep a vital aspect of addiction recovery. Fortunately, maintaining a balanced diet can help you get a good night's rest.

Studies show that:

- Consuming an adequate amount of [magnesium can help improve the quality of your sleep](#) by reducing the stress hormone cortisol which interrupts sleep.
- Eating a moderate amount of [protein before bed may help you sleep through the night](#).
- An antioxidant called [apigenin](#) in [chamomile](#) tea can help promote sleepiness and ease symptoms of insomnia.
- The [omega-3 fatty acid found in walnuts can convert to DHA in the body, which can increase serotonin production](#), calming the body and preparing it for rest.

Sleep helps the body heal wounds, build stronger muscle tissue, and restore the brain.

A good night's rest can also help:

- **Improve concentration**
- **Enhance productivity**
- **Regulate your blood pressure**
- **Lower the risk of heart disease**
- **Improve your mood**
- **Enhance your emotional wellbeing**
- **Reduce your risk of depression**
- **Boost the immune system**
- **Repair damage to muscles, tissues, tendons, ligaments, and organs**
- **Prevent relapse**

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## Helping You Recover From The Inside Out

At Meta Addiction Treatment, our mission is to equip and empower our clients with the knowledge and support they need to obtain and maintain long-term recovery. Addiction can weaken your physical body and harm your mental health. Luckily, a balanced diet can help you recover from addiction, strengthen your body, and enhance your overall well being. We hope this guide has helped you move towards that goal.

As always, we're available 24 hours per day at 1-844-909-2560 or [info@metaaddictiontreatment.com](mailto:info@metaaddictiontreatment.com).

