

What to Expect During Nutrition Recovery

Welcome to Michigan Medicine. This information will help you understand what to expect while you're in the hospital.

What is nutrition recovery?

Nutrition recovery is needed when a person has not been getting enough nutrition (food). **Nutrition recovery** is the process of eating enough food and a variety of foods to help the body heal. Nutrition recovery begins in the hospital and needs to continue after you leave the hospital.

What are the main steps in nutrition recovery?

We know that eating disorders can impact the whole person, body, and mind. Time, research, and experience have taught us a great deal about the best ways to help patients recover.

- Medical stabilization is the first step. **Medical stabilization** means making sure your body is physically safe. To do this, we closely monitor (keep track of) your vital signs and markers of health, like heart rate and heart rhythms, blood pressure, blood levels of important substances, weight, and physical functions during the recovery process.
- We increase calories slowly to help your body return to its normal function and to avoid problems. Your healthcare providers may call the process of increasing calories “refeeding” or “renourishment.”

We realize being in the hospital can be stressful, and for those with eating disorders, the refeeding process can cause distress or anxiety. Your team is here to support you in this process while helping you start to recover safely.

Who is on my nutrition recovery team?

We take a team approach to managing eating disorders. There is a large team of doctors, nurses, and staff taking care of each patient in recovery. Read more about the different types of team members below:

- **The patient:** You are part of the team! You can be helpful by:
 - Providing information that may help us care for you
 - Sharing strategies that work well for you that we can include with your hospital care
 - Asking thoughtful questions
 - Working to separate the eating disorder (including thoughts or behaviors that are not normal for you, and that you only have when your brain hasn't been getting enough nutrition) from your normal healthy self
- **Nursing staff:** Our nurses will provide ongoing support and monitoring throughout your hospital stay.
- **Medicine faculty hospitalists:** These are the main team of doctors who will watch your medical condition (looking at vital signs and doing a physical exam) each day.
- **Registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN):** Your RDN will plan your meals and snacks and help you plan ahead for weekends, because there are fewer staff members around on the weekends. You may not see the RDN every day.
- **Adult Consultation Liaison/Hospital Psychiatry staff:** A mental health team will check on how you're doing emotionally, provide some psychotherapy support and education, and help your family members support your emotional needs. Psychiatric prescribers may help you make decisions about medications during your hospital stay. You might not see the mental health team every day.

- **Adolescent Medicine staff:** We might ask these team members to consult about your care, because they have expertise in nutrition recovery. You may not see them, but they may share expertise with the medicine faculty hospitalist team and help us figure out nutrition goals and target weight ranges for you.
- **Other support staff:** Many other support staff are important to your care. Other staff you may see include nutrition techs and staff from Patient and Family Life, Gifts of Art, and spiritual care.

All team members will work together with you to decide when is the best time for you to leave the hospital and the next steps in your care, including follow-up and referrals. We welcome and encourage you to write down and ask us your questions.

What can I expect with monitoring my vital signs?

- Your vital signs include your heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature. In people who are severely undernourished, vital signs are low. This is the body trying to save energy when it isn't getting the nutrition it needs to function.
- We will connect you to a heart rate monitor that will give us ongoing information about your heart rate. Your nurse will help you when you need to disconnect or reconnect the heart monitor.
 - Your heart rate is usually lowest when you're lying down and at night.
 - Your heart rate often will rise a lot with very little activity, because the heart muscle has a weak squeeze. It needs to pump faster to get enough blood to other parts of the body.

- High heart rates when someone is **malnourished** (isn't getting enough nutrition) can be a sign of stress on the heart, and you may need to get more testing.
- You will be on bed rest for the first few days until your heart is more stable. After the first few days, we will remove the bed rest restrictions, but your activity will still be very limited so that your body is able to store nutrition.

What can I expect with monitoring my weight?

- We will weigh you first thing in the morning each day. We check your weight at the same time on the same scale in the same way every day.
- Often, your weight will go down for the first few days in recovery. Then, once your body is getting enough calories, the weight loss will stop and your weight will start to rise.
- As your weight rises, the organs in your body can start to heal. This healing process takes time, and it continues even after you leave the hospital.

What can I expect with testing and lab work?

While you're in recovery, we will monitor the levels of different chemicals in your body to keep you safe and healthy. These include:

- **Glucose** (also called **blood sugar**)
 - Your body makes glucose from digesting foods (like proteins, carbohydrates, and dietary fats), and then uses the glucose to make energy for all your body cells to use as fuel. Extra glucose is stored in chains called **glycogen**, and your body uses glycogen between meals to keep your blood sugar levels normal. You're your malnourished, you've used up your glycogen stores, so your blood sugar may be low between meals.

- We will monitor your blood sugar regularly.
- Phosphorus
 - Your body uses phosphorus to make energy.
 - We will monitor your phosphorus level during the refeeding period, and give you a phosphorus supplement if your phosphorus levels are getting low.
- Electrolytes (such as sodium, potassium, magnesium, bicarbonate, and chloride)
 - Electrolyte levels can be affected by restrictive eating, purging, or drinking too many fluids. We will monitor these levels as well.

What can I expect for nutrition?

Nutrition is the main treatment for undernutrition and eating disorders. We explain to our nutrition recovery patients that “**food is medicine.**” This means that, just like medicine, food may not taste great or it may cause feelings of discomfort and stress, but you need food to help your body heal.

- You need many different foods to make sure you get all the nutrients your body needs. Getting used to the taste and feel of different foods in your body is also important to healing and helping your gut get used to processing food again.

Who will choose my meals and snacks?

Your nurse will choose your first few meals until the registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) meets with you. Then your RDN will select meals and snacks for you.

- The reason you’re not choosing your own food is because patients’ eating disorders often don’t let them choose the types and variety of foods that their bodies need for recovery.

- We often use high calorie foods. This will help you get enough calories without causing too much stomach discomfort with large amounts of food at one time.
- We assume we can give you any and all foods unless you have a diagnosed or confirmed food allergy.

What will my meal schedule look like?

You will have 3 meals and 3 snacks every day on a schedule. You will need to complete eating the food in specific amounts of time:

- 30 minutes for meals
- 15 minutes for snacks

We'll monitor you for a 45-minute period after each meal or snack.

This eating schedule is important because your body's signals about hunger and fullness are not reliable right now. The stomachs of people with eating disorders empty slowly. Eating on a schedule, even if you're not hungry, trains your stomach to empty more quickly and heal.

What if I don't finish my meal?

- Finishing the meal includes eating all the toppings and condiments (like mayonnaise, butter, syrup, cream cheese, or salad dressing). However, you do not need to eat condiments like salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard, parsley garnish, or a lemon wedge if you do not want to.
- If you do not finish the meal in the scheduled amount of time, we will give you a liquid supplement to give you the energy you need. You can pick the flavor (between chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, or a variety). You have to drink this supplement within 10 minutes.

- If you don't finish the food or supplements that we give you, we will place a **nasogastric (NG) tube** through your nose. This will allow us to give you the liquid supplement and nutrition through the tube.
 - This is a necessary treatment for anyone with undernutrition who cannot get enough nutrition by mouth through food or supplements. It's similar to using an IV for a patient who cannot drink enough fluids to stay hydrated. We'll try to help you understand this is necessary for your health, and not a punishment. Remember, food is medicine.
 - The tube will stay in place until you can eat or drink enough by mouth.

What are some other nutrition guidelines I should know during my stay?

- No food from home is allowed, as it is very important that we monitor the exact nutrition you get during this time.
- We will not give you anything with artificial sweeteners, "diet" products, drinks with caffeine, hard candies, or gum.
- **Fluid balance is important.** You'll have a minimum amount of fluid to drink each day. We'll provide this as drinks with meals and snacks, as well as some water.
 - For patients who drink too much water, we may have to limit drinks and water to avoid problems with electrolytes.

What kind of meal support will I have from staff?

- Your nurse will deliver your food trays at the meal and snack times. Please call your nurse if it seems like your food is late so you don't get behind schedule.

- One of our hospital staff members must sit with you during all meals and snacks, and for a period of time after eating, to provide support and watch for eating disorder behaviors.
 - We do this with all our patients, even if they haven't had these kinds of behaviors before. The refeeding process can be quite challenging for the eating disorder, which will look for other ways to get rid of or avoid calories.
- If you have any concerns about the food trays, please talk with your nurse who can address the issue (or contact the people who can). You will not be able to have a new meal ordered.

What can I expect with activity limits?

Your body needs to take in more energy than it uses during your medical stabilization phase in the hospital and until you're fully recovered. Even if you are not physically active, your body needs more energy than someone who is not in nutrition recovery. Because of this, we have some activity limits for you while you're in the hospital.

- No unnecessary activity is allowed during your stay.
 - During your first 24 hours, you'll be on complete bed rest. We may ask your nurse or other staff to help you to the bathroom to keep you safe.
 - We can work together to try to prevent falls or fainting. As you get stronger and feel more steady on your feet, we will know that your fall risk is decreasing.
 - When your heart rate and blood pressure improve, the medical team will let you progress to sitting in the chair.
 - As you continue to improve, you'll be able to have supervised seated showers and short wheelchair rides on the unit.

- When using the bathroom, you should keep the door cracked slightly open at all times so we can reach you if needed. Keep the door fully open during activities like tooth brushing and hair styling.
- If you need a change to the thermostat setting (to change the temperature in your room), please tell the nurse who can help you with this.
- You're not allowed to look up calories or other nutrition and weight information online.

What can I expect with staff supervision during my hospital stay?

- A **patient care attendant (PCA)** will be with you the morning after your admission for supervision and support during your first 36-48 hours. Sometimes we use PCAs for a longer time during your stay if you need more monitoring.
- The PCA can be there to watch for and stop behaviors that have a harmful impact on your care.
- We might need a PCA if we are worried that you might harm yourself, or if we are worried that you may run away.
- Please tell your nurse immediately if there are any concerns about your PCA.

Again, please let us know if you have any questions or concerns so that we may partner with you in your care.

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