



Understanding Your Diet: A Guide to Health and Recovery

Why This Matters (Recovery Context)

- * Your diet directly impacts every aspect of your physical and mental health.
- * Making simple, informed changes to what you eat can significantly increase your longevity and reduce your risk of serious diseases.
- * In recovery from addiction, addressing nutritional deficiencies and improving your diet is a critical step to healing your body and brain.
- * What you eat can either fuel inflammation and disease or promote healing and well-being.
- * This guide helps you understand the "big stuff" to focus on first, giving you the power to dramatically improve your health.

What's Happening in the Brain and Body

- * **The Microbiome:** Your gut is home to trillions of bacteria (microbiome) essential for health. A diverse and healthy microbiome is crucial for brain function.
- * These bacteria digest fibre (prebiotics) that our bodies cannot.
- * This process produces short-chain fatty acids, which are vital for brain health and overall well-being.
- * **Inflammation:** A diet high in omega-6 fatty acids (from corn-fed meat and seed oils) and low in omega-3 fatty acids (from grass-fed meat and fish) creates a state of chronic, low-grade inflammation that damages your organs over time.
- * **Insulin Spikes:** Refined carbohydrates and sugar cause rapid spikes in blood sugar, leading to a large release of insulin. Over time, this can cause weight gain, insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, and type 2 diabetes.

The Addiction Lens

- * Substance use often leads to poor nutrition and specific vitamin deficiencies. It is recommended that individuals in recovery supplement with:
 - * Thiamine 100 mg daily.
 - * Magnesium 2 g daily.
 - * A single daily multivitamin.
- * **Caution with Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine):** Both too little and too much B6 can cause nerve damage (neuropathy). The maximum safe daily intake is 100 mg, but it's best to stay under 50 mg. Be aware that energy drinks are often fortified with B vitamins. Avoid taking multiple multivitamins or combining them with energy drinks to prevent B6 toxicity.
- * Alcohol use specifically depletes thiamine and pyridoxine.

Core Model or Framework: Avoiding Harmful Foods



A simple framework to identify and avoid harmful foods is "SSS PRU + Mercury":

- * Salt
- * Sugar
- * Saturated Fat
- * Processed Red Meat
- * Refined Carbohydrates
- * Ultra-Processed Food (Junk Food)
- * Mercury in certain fish

What This Looks Like in Real Life

- * **Junk Food:** Also known as ultra-processed food. A red flag is a long ingredient list with numbers and chemical names an older person wouldn't recognise. These foods often contain no fibre and use emulsifiers that prevent your gut from signalling that you are full, causing you to overeat.
- * **Sugar:** This means avoiding not just sugar in drinks, but also sweets, biscuits, cakes, and most processed foods, which have hidden sugars. Fruit is generally fine as the sugar is balanced with fibre and water.
- * **Saturated Fat:** Think of the solid, marbled fat in a steak versus liquid olive oil. You want the liquid, healthy fats flowing through your arteries. This means limiting red meat and full-fat dairy.
- * **Refined Carbohydrates:** This includes common white bread, pasta, and white rice. These foods have been stripped of fibre and nutrients, leaving only rapidly digested starch that acts like sugar in the body.

Practical Strategies for Recovery

- * **Cut out junk food:** This is the single most important change for improving longevity and reducing your risk of cancer, obesity, diabetes, stroke, and heart disease.
- * **Manage Omega-6 to Omega-3 Ratio:**
- * **Reduce Omega-6:** Avoid corn-fed beef and foods fried in seed oils (e.g., grapeseed oil). If you eat beef, ensure it is 100% grass-fed.
- * **Increase Omega-3:** Eat marine fish (sardines, mackerel, wild-caught salmon), grass-fed meats (including kangaroo), and consider algae oil if you are vegan.
- * **Choose Healthy Fats:** Use extra virgin olive oil for cooking. Do not use it for deep-frying; in general, avoid deep-fried foods. Avocado oil is also a healthy option.
- * **Limit Red and Processed Meat:** The World Health Organization classifies processed meat (sausages, beef jerky, etc.) as a Class 1 carcinogen. Limit red meat consumption to small portions of high-quality, grass-fed meat eaten infrequently.
- * **Switch Your Carbs:**
- * Replace white bread with true sourdough or rye bread.
- * Replace wheat pasta with chickpea or lentil pasta.



- * Replace white rice with brown or black rice.
- * **Feed Your Microbiome:**
- * **Prebiotics (Fibre):** Aim for at least seven servings of vegetables per day (approx. 40g of fibre). Beans are an excellent, inexpensive source of both fibre and protein.
- * **Probiotics (Good Bacteria):** Consume fermented foods like unsweetened Greek yogurt, kimchi, sauerkraut, and some cheeses (e.g., feta).
- * **Be Smart with Fish:** Avoid large, deep-sea fish which may have high mercury levels. Tilapia should also be avoided as it is high in omega-6.

Common Pitfalls

- * **"Healthy" Marketing:** Be wary of food labels that highlight one nutrient (e.g., "high in calcium") while hiding high levels of sugar, salt, or unhealthy fats.
- * **Alcohol's "Health Benefits":** There are no proven health benefits to drinking any amount of alcohol. The idea that a glass of red wine is good for you is based on flawed research.
- * **Fake Sourdough:** Supermarkets may sell "sourdough" that is just regular bread with vinegar added. True sourdough is fermented for at least 8 hours. Buy from an artisanal baker or learn to make it yourself.
- * **Gluten Issues vs. Celiac Disease:** Celiac disease is a serious autoimmune condition requiring strict avoidance of all gluten. Many people have digestive issues from wheat due to other components (FODMAPs, lectins, ATIs), and may tolerate true sourdough bread well.
- * **Cost:** High-quality food can be expensive. However, it is better for your health to eat smaller amounts of high-quality food less frequently than to eat large amounts of cheap, unhealthy food.

Key Take-Home Messages

- * Your diet is a powerful tool for health. Focus on eliminating harmful foods before worrying about minor supplement details.
- * Avoid ultra-processed foods, sugar, and unhealthy fats.
- * Prioritise whole foods: vegetables, lean proteins (especially fish and grass-fed meat), healthy fats (olive oil), and complex carbohydrates (sourdough, rye, brown rice).
- * Nourish your gut microbiome with plenty of fibre (prebiotics) and fermented foods (probiotics).
- * There is no health benefit to alcohol. For those with an alcohol issue, abstinence is the goal.

Optional Reflection Questions

- * Looking at my typical daily diet, what is one "big stuff" change I could make this week?
- * How can I increase the amount of fibre and vegetables in my meals?
- * What is one processed food I rely on that I could swap for a whole-food alternative?