

HEALTH

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TCM: Get over it

From a traditional Chinese medicine perspective, surgery damages the body by exhausting the blood and *qi*, causing internal disharmony. In post-operative care, TCM aims to rebuild the body's constitution and reduce associated risks.

After major surgery, especially in the abdominal region, digestive functions become suppressed. Bowel movements are slower, digestive secretions are reduced and the fluid in the large intestine is mostly reabsorbed. This leads to constipation and abdominal distention, and subsequently affects the appetite and nutritional intake. Dietary management is critical to the complete recovery of the body.

When the patient is allowed to eat again, they should start with diluted and easily digested fluids, such as orange juice, pure rice or millet porridge. If they're comfortable on the fluids, then the amount and concentration can be increased or replaced by semi-solids.

Frequent small servings of semi-solids with a variety of foods such as vegetables and fish or chicken soup should be served. Based on the condition, solid foods are then reintroduced. Following the appropriate steps is important to restore digestive functions in post-surgical patients. It's never advisable to force them to eat when their digestive systems aren't ready. Heavy meals, such as greasy tonic soups or meat stews, not only aggravate digestive problems, resulting in abdominal distention, nausea or

vomiting, but also interfere with wound healing and prolong the recovery time.

When a normal diet is resumed, patients still need to eat carefully. They need higher energy and protein content to aid healing. A wide variety of foods is necessary - meats, fish and eggs provide good protein sources for tissues to rebuild. Wholegrain foods such as millet, corn and peanuts provide vitamins and minerals that aid wound healing. Fruit and vegetables such as spinach, turnip, carrot and wax gourd also provide essential elements and promote bowel movements.

The meals should be prepared by steaming or boiling - raw and frozen foods should be limited. Fried and roasted foods are usually difficult to digest. Eight glasses of water a day help

keep the body hydrated. Caffeinated beverages should be avoided.

Based on the energy properties of food, TCM claims that certain ingredients have special effects in healing. For example, seaweed, hawthorn fruit, black fungus, mushrooms, onion, celery, water chestnut and preserved jellyfish help purify the blood and unblock vessels.

Peanuts, daylilies, lotus roots, couch grass rhizome and sponge cucumbers help arrest bleeding. Tomatoes, mung beans, ginger, hyacinth beans, garlic, reed rhizome, honey and arrowhead can act as antidotes and counteract inflammatory reactions.

Watermelon, wax gourd, bottle gourd, red rice beans, corn silk and carp induce urination and relieve edema. Ginger, smoked plum, chicken's gizzard-skin, malt, tangerine peel and fennel improve appetite.

Gingko fruit, apricot kernels, pears, rock sugar and Chinese radishes help arrest cough and reduce throat secretions. Maltose, jujube fruit and yaws promote digestive and absorption functions. Mutton, garlic chives, sea cucumbers, shrimps, longan aril, litchi and fish support overall body functions and enhance tissue reproduction.

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Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner