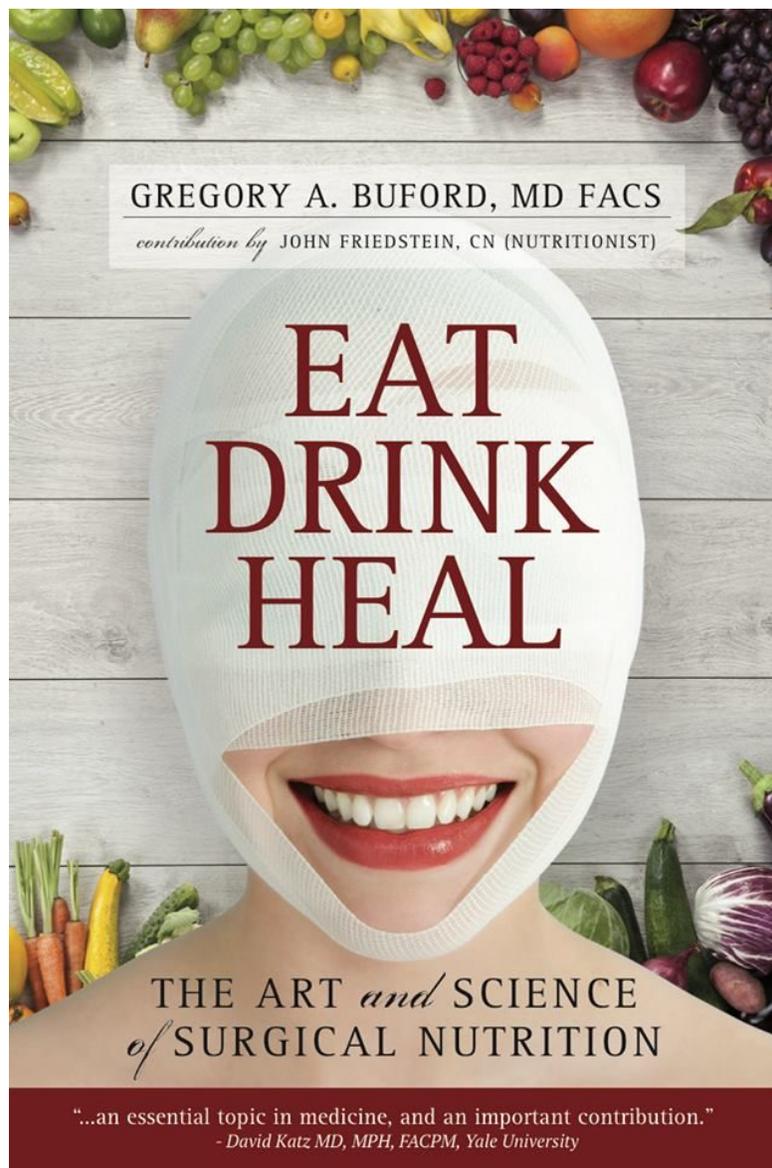


# Excerpts from *Eat, Drink, Heal*, by Dr. Gregory A. Buford



Eat, Drink, Heal: The Art and Science of Surgical Nutrition

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## Why This Information Is Important

*“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”*

- **Hippocrates** (philosopher)

## The Problem and Why You Should Care

Imagine a racetrack. Cars are ready to enter. Before they do, they are checked from head to toe—engines scrutinized for the smallest defect or deficiency, and all factors considered for the drive ahead. No driver would ever enter his car without this check, knowing that any missed item, any single problem, no matter how small, could mean the difference between not only winning and losing but also his exiting the car in one piece.

Now, imagine your operation. Every move of your surgeon’s hand is calculated and precise, every action intentional. You lie supine on the operating table, your body awaiting the first incision. When the surgery is over, you are taken to the recovery room, where the real journey begins—the journey of healing. What will set the stage for success or for failure has, in many ways, already been decided as a result of actions taken or not taken before you even entered the operating room.

You were prepared. Knowing that after surgery your body would be sent into metabolic overdrive, you prepared by eating healthy, balanced meals in the weeks before and supplemented with essential micronutrients necessary for optimal healing. You knew what was necessary. You prepared and were ready for what lay ahead.

As the weeks pass after surgery, your energy levels rapidly improve, your incisions heal without problems, and you eventually return to your normal life. Your decision to proactively prepare made all the difference in the world, but you are an exception; this is not what normally happens.

Your doctor prepared for this surgery for a good part of his life. His training provided him the latest and greatest in technology and the means to get you safely in and out of surgery. What he was not prepared for is one of the most critical elements to healing itself and something that much of the medical profession refuses to acknowledge as critical to the process of healing.

The medical profession is so focused on technology that it has left behind, and seemingly ignored, one of the most basic elements that can determine the course and the quality of your healing.

In the training curriculum of the top ten medical schools today (as ranked by U.S. News and World Report), only six allotted time to courses that included some focus on nutrition. While there was some emphasis, this information was supplied more in the form of “Curriculum Threads”, as opposed to a formal course dedicated to this critical topic. Despite the proven impact of a healthy diet on our bodies under normal conditions, the American medical profession treats its patients with nutritional standards that are outdated, washed-up, and grossly out of sync with the ever-growing database of knowledge regarding nutrition. This outdated information is being taught to our young physicians.

The question that must be asked: Why? Why do we continue to ignore data and devalue the importance of proper nutrition as a means for optimal healing?

There are several reasons, but one of the most apparent is the fact that with an ever-expanding base of knowledge, medical schools must focus on what they deem to be the most essential and filter out that which they regard as less important. Therein lies the problem. Medical school administrators simply do not see nutrition as critical to the training of physicians, and so these young minds are left to gather and assimilate this information on their own once released into private practice.

The interesting twist to this is that more and more physicians are stepping away from convention and taking the lead on their own in guiding their patients to improved outcomes and smoother recoveries by incorporating programs before and after surgery to promote healing. These doctors are the exception and not the rule. The sad fact is that several factors block more global adoption of this strategy, and threaten to do so for years to come, and to do so in combination with other factors which make it even more critical that patients are well-nourished both before and after their procedures.

The first problem is the global lack of emphasis on the importance of surgical nutrition. Little time, if any, is spent on educating the medical student on nutrition, and even less is spent once these young doctors are actively practicing medicine. Most doctors are simply too busy to spend time both educating their patients and educating themselves on what really works and what doesn't, so the same tired information is passed on from generation to generation.

Not only do we not know what we don't know about nutrition, but we also don't have the financial motivation to change our ways. There is little to no reimbursement for teaching our patients about proper nutrition. In addition, because there is no financial motivation for big drug companies to research supplements, this area is a big unknown and will no doubt remain so for years to come. There is data that shows efficacy but it is sparse, often questioned, and seen as suspect by the allopathic branch of the medical profession. As physicians continue to see more patients and get paid less, the pure and simple fact is that nutrition will never be a priority.

As costs associated with healthcare continue to rise, more surgeries are being performed on an outpatient basis in an effort to improve both cost and time-efficiency. With this rapid discharge, a greater burden is placed on both the patient and their immediate caregiver with respect to management of nutritional intake during this critical period of healing.

This issue alone has the potential to increase the risk for early complications and compromise optimal outcomes.

In addition, during the early post-operative period, surgical patients are in pain and often have very little appetite.

They are usually on a number of medications, which makes it challenging for them to prepare healthy meals and potentially reduces their interest in solid food. In addition, given the vast amount of information related to nutrition online and through the media, a majority of patients are often confused and literally paralyzed when it comes to making healthy choices. The result? Many eat poorly; some eat little to nothing at all. In so doing, their bodies are robbed of important building blocks for the repairs that are essential for healing during this critical period.

Add to this the fact that before surgery, we doctors typically provide you with little to no nutritional guidance. As previously mentioned, we are not only poorly trained in the area of surgical nutrition, but, quite simply, we do not have the time, the interest, or the appreciation for the importance of early postoperative nutrition. Even the best surgical training programs continue to place little value on nutrition, and instead, choose to focus on technical aspects of surgery and the growing importance of cost-containment.

When issues do arise, they often present in the form of wound-healing complications and sub-optimal results. These complications not only increase healing time but may also compromise the quality of life. The end result is that a surgical procedure performed by a talented surgeon on a motivated patient may ultimately lead to a sub-optimal result, simply because the proper nutrients were not available during the early phases of healing.

To optimally heal, proper building blocks need to be made available, not only after surgery but also before surgery so that each patient is adequately prepared for the procedure itself. This requires education, planning, and the recognition of the importance of surgical nutrition.

The medical system needs to change from the ground up, not only with regard to educating our doctors, but also with regard to the education of our patients. We need to improve how we approach surgery from the standpoint of the surgeon as well as the patient, and both sides ultimately need to bear responsibility for outcomes. It is no longer acceptable to simply play naive and cross our fingers. The time has come for a paradigm shift, and we must move forward in a manner that is both responsible and reasonable and that benefits both parties.

This book is a wake-up call to your doctor as well as to you, the consumer. What you do with it can make all the difference to your health.

# How to Use This Book Most Effectively

This book is designed to be a guide for you not only before your surgery, but also for the rest of your life. How you eat determines both how you heal and the course of your overall health. To better understand how to effectively use this information, let's talk about its organization and what you really need to focus on.

The book is structured into the following segments:

- **Why This Information Is Important**
- **What You Need for Optimal Healing**
- **What You Need for Optimal Health**
- **How You Can Learn More About Proper Nutrition**

The first section (**Why This Information Is Important**) lays the groundwork and explains not only how and why proper nutrition is important for healing, but also expresses the underlying reasons for writing this book. Start here so that you understand the basic premise behind the book itself, as well as the ultimate direction of its contents.

The following section (**What You Need for Optimal Healing**) is critical for anyone undergoing surgery anytime soon. You need to read this information and digest it (no pun intended) accordingly. This is the stuff that will help you heal better and help make your recovery as smooth as possible. Read this information carefully and thoughtfully, and take good notes. Use it to prepare for your surgery, and definitely share it with your surgeon.

The next section (**What You Need for Optimal Health**) provides a foundation for attaining and maintaining long-term health.

While this chapter is informative, you can read it after the prior essential chapter related to surgical healing, but definitely read it at some point. It's essential!

The concluding section (**How You Can Learn More**) provides a broad array of information that will help you stay current in the various aspects of optimal nutrition and serves as a reference point. This can be read last.

Like most of you, I have started reading many books, only to become overwhelmed and ultimately put them down after the initial few chapters. I don't want you to do this. Please feel free to skip forward to essential chapters and return to any peripheral information at a later time. But use this information. If you do, it can have very positive effects on the course of your surgery and the healing period that follows.

A wise man once said, "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count; it's the life in your years." Although I am hopefully nowhere near the end, I would have to agree with him completely. Be well, and enjoy the rest of the book. It just may change your life...if you let it!