

MAXIMIZING HEALING:

Supporting Surgery with Alternative Medicine

Terry Ycasas, DC

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The biggest decision I have ever made was last year when I decided to move forward with top surgery. As an alternative health care provider, I don't typically participate in Western medicine. I can be suspicious of Western medicine's over-reliance on pharmaceuticals for the treatment of symptoms, while dismissing natural remedies and the importance of overall holistic wellness. But I also believe in supporting people being comfortable in their bodies. I scheduled my surgery for February and made a commitment to myself to being as healthy as possible by using alternative wellness resources prior to and after the surgical procedure.

Now, three months post-op, I can say that my recovery has been phenomenal. I believe it is a direct result of my pre- and post surgery wellness regime. This was confirmed by the surgeon *who quipped that I was an A-plus patient and a nurse who commented that they should write an article on my recovery process!* I initially chuckled at the idea of an article being written about my healing. However, upon reflection, and as an alternative care provider dedicated to holistic health, I realized how important it is to share what I learned so others have the same opportunity for maximizing their recovery. After all, I had benefited on others' stories and resources to help me prepare for and recover from surgery.

As my contribution back to the community, I want to share information about what helped me through my journey. I can't guarantee or promise that your experience will be the same as mine, as we are all different and unique individuals. But I want to share any information I can that may help improve someone else's chances for a better healing journey.

To be clear, this is not medical advice. You should always defer to your physician(s) and their team and ensure that you follow their protocols. This article simply describes the steps that I proactively incorporated into my life to help my healing. Some of these steps may also seem overwhelming at first! I recognize that a lot of what I'm sharing below may be completely new concepts for a lot of folks. In some cases, there may be barriers to being able to do some of the protocols. If you decide to move forward with these steps, I suggest taking one step at a time.

Consider what you know about yourself and your body, focus on what resonates with you and go from there.

If you could only do some of the protocols, I would recommend five of the listed items: intermittent fasting, an anti-inflammatory diet, an alkaline diet, exercise, and yoga. (*I'll talk about those five things in more detail below*). Again, these steps are simply what worked for me to support my body's health.

My top surgery goals were to:

- 1) reduce inflammation
- 2) promote alkalinity
- 3) promote more efficient healing
- 4) strengthen my body's constitution and all of its systems

Each topic is explained below. The specific protocols I used are listed at the end of the article

Reducing Inflammation & Intermittent Fasting

First and foremost, let's clarify: What is inflammation? Inflammation is the body's natural response to protect us from infection, injury, or disease. There are two types of inflammation: Acute and chronic. Cnet.com has a great description and analogy (<https://www.cnet.com/how-to/what-is-an-anti-inflammation-diet-and-how-does-it-work/>):

"One way you can compare the two is to think of it as a fire: acute inflammation is like the small fire pit you build to roast marshmallows; chronic inflammation would be the huge wildfire that can spread and cause a lot of damage. The key with inflammation is that you want it to stay small and contained when it happens, not something that spreads all over your house and land, destroying your home and prized possessions in the process.

Chronic inflammation is the widespread, low-grade inflammation that is increasingly being studied and linked to many health problems such as heart disease, autoimmune conditions and even depression and anxiety. Inflammation can also be a culprit for less serious issues such as headaches, joint pain or low energy. One thing that many experts say is a driving force is your diet.

Acute inflammation isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's the body's response to an injury as it attempts to heal and restore itself back to the state prior to injury. Similarly, when we go through a procedure like surgery, our bodies move through that inflammatory process to heal.

Chronic inflammation, on the other hand, can have long-term and whole-body effects. It is a systemic inflammation because it produces a constant, steady stream of low-grade inflammation throughout the body. Now, imagine if you injure yourself repeatedly - your body would be in a chronic state of inflammation as it tries to heal. This scenario is essentially what occurs when we eat foods that we are sensitive or, allergic to, or irritate our gut lining. The most common allergens are gluten, dairy, sugar, soy, corn, and for some, nightshades. Everyone is unique as are each person's sensitivities.

Our bodies require essential nutrients (water, fruits, vegetables, minerals, healthy protein, etc.) for daily function and particularly when healing from something as intense as surgery. If we eat inflammatory foods 3x/day with a snack here and there, we're basically injuring and stressing our bodies, over and over again. If your body is already in a chronic state of inflammation, and then you go through an even more stressful procedure like surgery, your body has to work that much harder to heal as it's already allocating most resources to healing the chronic inflammation. Therefore, it's going to take that much more time to heal. However, if you go through surgery with less inflammation, your body's resources aren't siphoned off to take care of the chronic inflammation. Your body will instead be optimized to allocate resources to heal the surgical procedure more efficiently and in a shorter time frame.

So, it was clear that my first step in prepping for surgery was to tackle my diet. About one year prior to surgery, I started intermittent fasting and did a 16:8 ratio, where I fasted for 16 hours and ate for eight hours. The amount of inflammation I lost was drastic. To break it down: "especially in the Western world, people eat all the time and that's a fairly recent habit in human evolution," Dr. Miriam Merad, an author on intermittent fasting and the director of Precision Immunology Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. Merad suggests that the amount of inflammation-causing cells we have in our society today may be a product of overeating. "We wondered whether the number of monocytes (white blood cells that help fight off infections) we call normal is, in fact, not normal — in

fact puts us at risk... and may be unnecessary, may reflect our recent dietary habits,” Merad said. “Somehow we have acquired dietary habits that are putting us at risk for inflammation.”

Then I adopted an anti-inflammatory diet one month prior to surgery. I avoided all gluten, dairy, sugar, soy (tamari is okay, unless you have an allergy to soy), pork, beef, processed foods, trans fats, and alcohol. This was a challenge even for me. While I am careful about my diet I am also known in my social circles as a foodie. I sure do love my food, so it *was* really tough to give up *some* of the foods listed above. Breads, baked goods, and chocolate bars were the most difficult. But, I reminded myself that this diet was for a greater good. I trudged on and ate more home-cooked vegan meals with the occasional serving of chicken or fish, eliminating the items mentioned above. By doing so, not only did my inflammation decrease, but as an added bonus, I also noticed an increase in my energy levels and felt better overall.

Promoting Alkalinity

In terms of pH and alkalinity, let's go back to high school chemistry for a moment: 7.0 pH is neutral, while numbers lower than 7.0 are acidic and numbers greater than 7.0 are alkaline (on a scale of 0 - 14). The ideal body pH is 7.2 - 7.4 (depending on who you ask), which is slightly alkaline. The kidneys are in charge of balancing fluids and maintaining an ideal pH in the body. So when we consume foods and drinks, those substances are reported to the kidney as being either acidic or alkaline. Consuming acidic foods lowers the body's pH. The kidneys job then is to reduce that acidity. It accomplishes this by having bones release calcium and magnesium to reestablish alkalinity, and breaking down muscles to produce ammonia, a strong alkaline substance. In other words, your bones and muscles are broken down to help maintain a proper pH, which will lead to thinner bones and lower muscle mass. In effect, having an acidic diet taxes the system by pulling resources from different parts of the body and reallocates them to help rebalance that acidity. Therefore, an alkaline diet, especially before undergoing surgery, aids the body by maintaining homeostasis (state of equilibrium or balance) to be able to better withstand the stress of surgery. Other benefits of an

alkaline diet include lowering chronic pain and inflammation, boosting vitamin absorption, and helping to improve immune function.

The basic foundation of an alkaline diet is that you can change the pH balance of your body through the foods you eat. When you eat acidic foods, your body will tend toward acidity which will make you vulnerable to disease and illness, including, arthritis, osteoporosis, kidney and liver, and even cancer. Whereas, when you eat alkaline foods such as organic fruits and vegetables, plant proteins, and green drinks, your body will tend toward alkalinity and improve your health. An alkaline diet and an anti-inflammatory diet can go hand-in-hand, in that a large part of both protocols are about diet.

In addition to eliminating inflammatory foods and eating more alkalizing foods, I increased the amount of nutritious food. Generally speaking, most of us do not get enough nutrients from our everyday diets. Furthermore, fruits and vegetables in our stores today contain far fewer nutrients than they did 50 years ago (modern farming techniques, long-haul transportation, and crop breeding practices emphasize producing cheap food; in effect they contribute to the decline of vitamins and minerals). If we don't have enough nutrients, our bodies can't do their job. If our bodies can't do their job, we're creating a stressful environment that takes longer to heal. Anticipating that my body was going to have to work harder to heal after surgery, I nourished it with as many nutrients as possible: I had daily smoothies with a lot of greens and supplements, I took nutritional supplements, and I ate a well-balanced diet.

Exercise & Yoga

The next step was exercise and movement. Any exercise will work and you should focus on what you enjoy and what works for your body. I did Lagree (<https://www.lagreefitness.com/about>), Ashtanga-based yoga (<https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/4979/ashtanga-yoga>), and yin yoga (<https://somuchyoga.com/yin-yoga/>) to ensure that I had core strength and flexibility. I had already been working out and doing yoga regularly prior to my procedure. However, if you don't have a regular routine, I'd suggest starting an exercise routine three months before surgery.

I firmly believe that exercise and yoga sped up my post surgery comfort and recovery. For example, the day of my surgery I experienced a lot of discomfort and had a hard time moving and getting around, which is expected even under the best circumstances. By that afternoon, I was able to (awkwardly) navigate and push/pull myself up from bed because I had built up strength and flexibility. I know for certain that I wouldn't have been able to do so if I hadn't practiced Lagree and yoga. I'm not suggesting that you should force yourself to get up on your own, right after surgery. I'm saying that the core strength and flexibility I built, made it possible for me to move and balance with much more agility, stability, and grace that I otherwise would not have had. At least as much grace as one can have after having major surgery.

I credit the proactive steps I took for quickly moving from post surgery fatigue to a return to my normal energy levels. Colleagues and friends even noted that I didn't look or act like I had just had surgery.

My smooth recovery continued when I went to my first post-op appointment one week after surgery. As an indication of progress, my surgery team was looking for my drains to be under 30 cc of liquid (the amount of fluid/bloody runoff that flows into the drains) for at least two days in a row. The only time that I was ever over 30 cc, was on the day of surgery. All the days after surgery, I was well under that mark. Because of that, my drains were removed one week after the operation.

The protocols that I proactively incorporated into my life to help my healing are listed below. As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, the five things that I'd recommend most would be intermittent fasting, an anti-inflammatory diet, an alkaline diet, exercise, and yoga. Focus on what resonates with you and go from there.

Pre-surgery

- Chiropractic (at least three months before surgery)
 - Removes restrictions in the spine so that the body can move more freely. Also removes nerve interferences so that your nervous system, which innervates everything in your body, can function more optimally. It can also move the body and its systems to a

parasympathetic (i.e., rest and digest) state, which is where healing occurs (note that healing never occurs when the body is in a fight or flight state). Getting a chiropractic adjustment can also boost your immune system 300% within 15 minutes of that adjustment.

- BodyTalk (at least one month before surgery)
 - BodyTalk is a safe, effective, non-invasive form of energy medicine. It syncs communication pathways throughout your system and releases stored stress. BodyTalk improves surgical outcomes in many ways: reduced recovery time, less pain, fewer medications, better digestion, improved movement, and greater psychological ease. BodyTalk expedites your return to regular activities while supporting your total health.
Learn more about it here: <https://www.synergywellness.org/>

- Acupuncture (at least one month before surgery)
 - Acupuncture can help to boost the immune system, lower inflammation, and counteract stress and anxiety in preparation for surgery. During the post-op period, acupuncture encourages circulation to the areas in question, which can lead to lower inflammation levels, reduced pain, and faster healing times. It can also break up scar tissue and reduce the appearance of surgical scars.

- IV therapy (at least two months before surgery and up to one month before surgery)
 - IV nutritional therapy can be a useful treatment for patients prior to surgery. Echoing what was described above: by saturating the body with adequate minerals and vitamins prior to surgery, we can optimize the healing process and boost the immune system. Common vitamins and minerals found in pre-surgical IV formulations include vitamin C, B vitamins, zinc, and selenium all of which may aid in

wound healing, decrease inflammation, reduce healing time, and enhance the immune response.

- Yoga (at least three months before surgery)
 - Incorporating yoga asana (postural form), pranayama (breathing form), and meditation can greatly support one's wellness journey in preparing for and recovering from surgery. It helps to support and strengthen the nervous system, cardiovascular health, circulatory system, immune system, endocrine system, and promote a parasympathetic nervous system. By residing in a state of equanimity more often helps to mentally prepare for surgery, improve physical response to this stress on the body, and support the immune system throughout recovery. Yoga can also aid in tissue repair and decrease recovery time.
 - Yoga can also help increase physical strength, range of motion, and overall vitality of the body. Moving into surgery from a space of physical health encourages the body's recovery response and also better prepares the body for a post-op period of decreased movement. During initial weeks following surgery, breathing exercises and meditation can help to support the body's recovery. Once cleared for physical activity, one can gradually begin to add the practice of yoga postures, and more specifically, utilizing an asana that can help mobilize or gently stress areas that have been stagnant or immobilized can help alleviate the feeling of tightness and constriction in the body. Yoga in this way can help with remodeling the connective tissues and promote the physical healing process. Consulting an experienced yoga instructor for guidance is always recommended.

- Strength/Core building workouts (at least three months before surgery)
 - Your core, which involves the shoulders, spine, abdomen, pelvis, and hips, is your support system. It is the chain that links the upper and lower regions of your body. It controls movements, keeps you

upright, helps shift weight, and helps you move through the world. Core workouts train the muscles in these regions to work in harmony, which leads to enhanced balance and stability.

- Alpha-Stim Machine (at least one month before surgery)
 - Alpha-Stim is a cranial electrotherapy stimulation device that is clinically proven to safely and effectively treat anxiety, depression, and insomnia. A tiny current of electricity is passed through two electrodes that clip onto your earlobes, restoring balance to your brainwaves and making you feel better -- fast. It is a drug-free, noninvasive way to lower mental stressors and help lead to overall wellness.

- Intermittent fasting (at least three months before surgery)
 - An eating pattern where one cycles between periods of eating and fasting. When we fast, there is a significant reduction in blood sugar and insulin levels. It also benefits our metabolic process, and can help protect from diseases.
 - The ideal fasting ratio is 16:8 (i.e., fasting for 16 hours and eating for 8). No food is allowed during the fasting period, but supplements, water, coffee, and tea (no sugar and cream) are allowed as long as there are no calories.

- Anti-inflammatory diet (at least one month before surgery)
 - An eating plan that prevents or reduces chronic inflammation. It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, lean protein, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats.
 - Avoid: sugar, high fructose corn syrup, trans fats, vegetable and seed oils like soybean and canola oils (I cook with avocado oil), refined carbs, alcohol, beef, pork, and processed meats.

- Alkaline foods (at least one month before surgery)
 - Organic fruits and vegetables are grown in mineral dense soil that tends to be more alkalizing.
 - Raw foods
 - Green juices/smoothies
 - <https://paleoleap.com/15-delicious-paleo-smoothies/>
 - Lemon juice in water (note that freshly squeezed lemon juice used within a few minutes is best)
 - Alkaline water

- Nutritional supplements (at least one month before surgery)
 - The table below is a Pre-Post Surgery Nutritional Program from “Staying Healthy” by Elxon M. Haas. I did not adhere to it strictly, but it did give me a good guideline as to where I wanted to focus my supplements. Generally speaking, I focused on the following:
 - Water
 - Fiber
 - Vitamin A, B complex, C, D (vitamin D is especially important if you live in a region that does not get as much sunlight)
 - Essential minerals (many of which can be found in bone broth)
 - Minerals found in bone broth: iron, zinc, selenium, boron and manganese
 - Most recipes for bone broth have the same foundation. It’s a matter of what your taste preferences are. I tend to add tamari and Red Boat’s fish sauce to give it a more Asian and umami flavor profile. Here is a great place to start:
 - <https://wellnessmama.com/5888/bone-broth/>
 - Collagen
 - Can be found in bone broth
 - I also used Vital Proteins Collagen Peptides
 - Liver support (our liver is what processes and detoxes the general anesthesia and meds)
 - I used Premiere Research Labs Liver ND

- Pre, Pro, Post-biotics (gut health is vitally important to help digest food better, improve immunity, and prevent infections)
- Found in fermented foods
- I used Premiere Research Labs Fermented Greens, Fermented Beets, and Fermented Turmeric
- You can also take pre, pro, and post-biotic supplements

Nutrient	Amount		Nutrient	Amount
Water	2 -3 qt		Chromium	200 mcg
Fiber	10 - 15 g		Copper	2 -3 mg**
Protein	70 - 100 g		Iodine	100 - 200 mcg
Fat	50 - 75 g		Iron	20 mg
Vitamin A	10,000 - 20,000 IU*		Magnesium	500 - 800 mg
Beta-carotene	15,000 IU		Manganese	10 mg
Vitamin D	400 IU		Molybdenum	800 mcg
Vitamin E	200 IU		Potassium	2 -3 g
Vitamin K	300 mcg		Selenium, as selenomethione	200 mcg
Thiamin (B1)	50 mg		Silicon	100 - 200 mg
Riboflavin (B2)	25 - 100 mg		Sulfur	400 - 800 mg
Niacin (B3)	25 mg		Vanadium	150 - 300 mcg
Niacinamide (B3)	50 mg		Zinc	60 - 100 mcg**
Pantothenic acid (B5)	500 - 1000 mg		L-amino acids	1000 mg
Pyridoxine (B6)	500 - 1000 mg		L-arginine	500 - 1000 mg
Pyridoxine (B6)	50 mg		L-lysine	500 - 1000 mg

Pyridoxal-5-phosphate	25 mg		Lactobacillus	2 billion organisms
Cobalamin (B12)	200 Mcg		Bromelain	200 - 400 mg
Folic acid	800 mcg			
Biotin	300 mcg		* 10,000-20,000 IU vitamin A should only be used 4 - 6 weeks, beginning 1 or 2 weeks before surgery and continuing 2-3 weeks after. At other times, the amounts should be limited to ~5000 IU daily.	
Inositol	1000 mg			
Vitamin C	4 - 6 g			
Bioflaonoids	500 mg			
Calcium	800 - 1200 mg		**The amount should be higher if zinc is taken -- about 20:1 ratio of zinc to copper	

Post-surgery

- Chiropractic
- Body Talk
- Acupuncture
- Homeopathy (check with your homeopath or naturopath to determine which homeopathic remedies are best for you)
 - Homeopathy is a misunderstood and often underutilized medicinal intervention. It can be very gentle on the body while effectively treating acute conditions, as well as providing many forms of relief during post-surgery recovery. Because it works on a deeper energetic level of healing, homeopathy pairs nicely with conventional medicine. It can be taken in conjunction with pharmaceutical medications without risk of interactions.

Primary Remedies - Homeopathy for surgery

- Arnica montana - Relieves pain, bruising and swelling associated with trauma, surgery or overexertion. It should be taken as close to going in for surgery as possible.
 - Bellis perennis - Useful when bruising and trauma occur to deep internal tissues after surgery involving the abdomen, breasts, or trunk—especially if a feeling of stiffness or coldness has developed in the area.
 - Hypericum perforatum - Relieves pain (particularly shooting nerve pain).
 - Ledum palustre - Relieves bruising around wounds (especially in conjunction with pain from sharp objects).
 - Phosphorus - Helpful if a person has trouble recovering from the effects of anesthesia. Symptoms can include disorientation, stupor, weakness, nausea and vomiting. The person may be thirsty but often vomits after drinking.
 - Staphysagria - Relieves itching or pain in surgical wounds.
- Surgery tincture (external use *around* the surgical incisions)
 - Calendula Officinalis – For abrasions, wounds, burns, eczema, varicosities, inflammation and irritation of the respiratory and digestive tracts
 - Echinacea Spp - immuno-stimulator, lymphatic, antimicrobial (antibacterial & antiviral), anti-inflammatory
 - Hydrastis Canadensis - antimicrobial, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, astringent
 - Laser therapy
 - Lasers emit specific wavelengths of low levels of light that are absorbed by the cell's mitochondria (energy-producing organelles),

which can increase cellular energy production and ultimately enhance healing of the surrounding tissue. Lasers can help reduce inflammation, support a healing environment, and reduce scars.

- I use scalar wave lasers
- Graston or Instrument-Assisted Soft Tissue Mobilization (IASTM)
 - Stainless steel instruments used to treat acute, chronic, or post-op soft tissue conditions by breaking apart scar tissues, changing reflexes in muscles that have a chronic holding pattern, and increasing blood flow and cellular activity
- Intermittent fasting (continue at least one month after surgery but it's ok to have bone broth and/or juice/smoothies for nutritional support if you feel your body needs the extra nutrients during fasting times)
- Anti/Non-inflammatory diet (at least one month after surgery)
 - It's a good idea to continue such a diet as your body continues to heal. After a month, and if you're really craving something outside of the anti/non-inflammatory diet, I'm a fan of the 80/20 rule where you eat anti/non-inflammatory 80% of the time and allow yourself other foods 20% of the time
- Bone broth

My positive experience using the above protocols to help me prepare for and recover from top surgery prompted me to share my journey. The protocols can be used by anyone undergoing any type of surgery, and for those who want a healthy body and a healthy life. So much of today's society and culture pushes us into imbalance - we're overworked, stressed out, and we lack a health and wellness-oriented perspective and resources. I strongly believe that alternative medicine is *an* answer to bringing more balance to our lives. I personally view all

of the above protocols (except for the homeopathic remedies and tinctures specific to surgery) as an important and lifelong treatment plan, which I participate in on a regular basis.

Receiving regular alternative medicine care (such as chiropractic, naturopathic, acupuncture, energy work), eating a balanced diet, exercising, and having a meditation practice might seem daunting at first. Gradually add a protocol here and there, building over time. One day you'll find that alternative medicine has simply become a part of your life, as it has mine. It is an investment in your vitality and health that will pay dividends for your efforts. I wish you health, vitality, and balance in your surgery journey.

And that feeling of being comfortable in your own body? Priceless.