Recipe for Recovery

How Nutrition Education and Dietary Changes Can Support Recovery
An Analysis of Unidine’s Partnerships for Rehabilitation Facilities
For more than 15 years, Unidine’s Healthcare Culinary Group has developed food and dining management programs with a focus on population health for patients, hospital employees and your community. By leveraging our expertise in nutrition, culinary skills, hospitality, and education, we look to enhance more than just the dining experience at your hospital, but to contribute to the overall health and well-being of your patients and employees.

This report presents an overview of the nutritional implications of substance addiction and how Unidine’s holistic approach to food and dining can contribute positively to addiction recovery in rehabilitation facilities.
Overview: Substance Addiction

A balanced, nutritious diet is a critical component of health and well-being for everyone, but is especially of importance for individuals recovering from addiction. In 2017, the World Health Organization estimated that every year, worldwide, 3.3 million deaths occur as result of harmful alcohol consumption, and 15.3 million people using drugs in a harmful way (1).

With substance addiction on the rise as a prevalent public health concern, it is essential to examine treatment strategies in a holistic manner that combine multiple therapies with enhanced nutritional support.

Health Impacts Of Substance Addiction

Drug and alcohol abuse can significantly impair healthy digestion processes, leading to constipation, diarrhea, indigestion and decreased appetite. Chronic substance addiction damages the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, and disrupts or completely blocks the body from absorbing essential vitamins, minerals, and amino acids such as thiamine, calcium, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid, vitamins A, B₁, B₆, C, D, E, and K, magnesium, and zinc (2). Individuals suffering from alcohol addiction may feel full from alcohol, which is high in calories but completely lacking in nutrients. Opiate or stimulant addiction results in individuals often forgoing eating due to suppressed appetite, poor food preparation skills and environments, and using money to purchase drugs instead of food.

These combined factors contribute to malnutrition, which directly impacts the neurotransmitter functions that are crucial to healthy brain activities that control mood and behavior. Without adequate nutrients, the brain is unable to differentiate between cravings for food and drugs or alcohol, making it difficult to overcome the initial withdrawal symptoms during detoxification, as well ultimately achieving success in long-term substance abstinence and recovery.

Malnutrition and dietary imbalances associated with substance addiction cause significant impacts to physical and mental health, and can contribute to the increased long-term risk of developing other diseases such as liver disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, mood disorders, and lowered immune function (3).
Nutrition's Role In Substance Addiction Recovery

Providing nutritional knowledge and incorporating healthy eating habits into a holistic treatment approach at rehabilitation programs helps to support recovery by restoring physical and mental health, and reducing the likelihood of relapse.

Studies have shown that patients in recovery have limited knowledge on dietary recommendations and nutritional guidelines. Thus, they tend to consume less than the recommended minimum amount of vegetables, fruits and grains, and are more likely to consume sweets or foods with low nutritional value (4). Introducing nutritional education during the initial stages of the recovery process provides crucial dietary support that helps patients adjust from a diet based in junk food and fast food to a more well-rounded diet.

During the initial detoxification phase, patients suffering from malnutrition may experience discomfort when eating and difficulty digesting foods due to damaged GI tracts. To better support their needs, a smoothie or shake made with fresh vegetables and fruits, and dietary supplements can deliver nutritional benefits with comfort and ease.

The Mediterranean diet is an optimal plan to support substance addiction recovery. Plentiful in healthy proteins from lean meat and fish, fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, spices and herbs, nuts, and extra virgin olive oils, this diet helps to reincorporate macronutrients and micronutrients into the body (5). It is also an excellent source of amino acids that fuel the brain functions needed to overcome substance cravings and achieve long-term recovery.

Unidine's Recipe for Recovery

At Unidine, we pride ourselves on providing food and dining options that are culinary-centric, health-focused, and tailor-made to meet your community’s tastes, needs, and interests. From in-room service to restaurant-style dining options, our commitment to fresh ingredients and scratch cooking is designed to support your organization’s wellness strategies. Our globally-inspired, customized menus utilize only the freshest, locally sourced when possible, ingredients, and deliver a variety of healthy dining options that will excite and educate the members of your community.

Unidine’s team of creative culinary experts and over 160 clinical dietitians stay current with the latest clinical evidence to develop programs that facilitate healthy food choices, promote nutritional education, and improve population health. As an industry leader in food and dining services with extensive experience in partnering with rehabilitation facilities, Unidine melds culinary creativity, service excellence and evidence-based research to deliver the Recipe for Recovery:

- **Reintroduce** macro and micronutrients that support health brain functions to overcome withdrawal
- **Reduce** likelihood of relapse by curbing cravings
- **Restore** physical and mental health
- **Reinforce** with nutritional education to support healthy decision-making

Our four-ingredient recipe is easily integrated into your community’s existing dining management operations, and is designed to enhance your treatment therapies and programs, and boost patient outcomes.
References


