

The Nutrition Program is one of several modalities at the NICoE dedicated to healing traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions. The mission of the Nutrition Program is to introduce service members to the ways food influences health, and to increase awareness about the impact food choices can have on their symptoms, healing and recovery from traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions. By introducing this concept and providing initial tools, the program aims to equip service members with the information they need to adopt a clean-eating or anti-inflammatory nutritional plan.

The Role of Nutrition in Healing TBI and PH Conditions

When the body is provided with the necessary nutrients, it can better repair, heal and build. Therefore, nutrition complements the NICoE's full suite of therapies by setting the best possible foundation from which the body can heal. (See sidebar for more information.)

Structuring the Nutrition Program

The program is composed of both individual and group sessions. Typically, each service member partakes in two group nutrition classes and they have the option of taking individual sessions if they would like. In some cases, an individual may require or request more intensive therapy—whether due to individual motivation to adopt a clean-eating lifestyle or due to identified nutritional deficiencies. In these cases, they may participate in as many as four individual classes.

Skill Building Group Sessions: Each service member participates in two 50-minute group sessions that allow for hands-on games such as identifying foods as anti-inflammatory or pro-inflammatory, or guessing the sugar content of specific foods. They are also able to compare and rate each other's plates, encouraging each other to learn more about specific and engrained food habits.

Tailored Individual Sessions: In addition, each service member also has at least one 50-minute individual sessions with the nutritionist. During these sessions, service members benefit from one-on-one discussions with the nutritionist. They work together to tailor a food plan that benefits particular health needs and fits into the service member's lifestyle.

Program Benefits

As with all of the modalities employed at the NICoE, the Nutrition Program helps service members learn to live with and recover from comorbid TBI and PH conditions. Service members are introduced to an eating plan that will help heal their brain, and they are given skills to begin to incorporate these healthy food choices into their daily habits. Because transforming a nutritional regimen takes months, sessions offered at the NICoE aim to provide education and awareness that will assist service members in creating new habits once they return home.

Healing from the Inside

Whether an individual is experiencing problems related to sleep, neurological issues, brain function or hypervigilance, nutrition can enhance and facilitate recovery. Several nutrients may speed recovery from TBI by helping to generate new neurons and blood vessels, and by decreasing oxidative stress and inflammation. This nutritional foundation sets the stage for the body to fully benefit from other therapies offered as part of the NICoE's approach to care.