The role of nutrition in the management of lower extremity wounds.

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BACKGROUND: From 3000 BC, healers have understood the importance of nutrition in wound care and used nutritional supplements to aid healing. Many of the teachings from Hippocrates, the father of modern-day medicine, clearly state his firm belief that good health can be achieved through nutrition.

DISCUSSION: In the early 1900s when advances in biochemistry were frequent, many of the essential constituents of nutrition were characterized, which formed the basis for many animal and human wound-healing experiments. This led to the discovery of vitamin C, zinc, and many other components essential for the orderly progression of healing. Modern-day research has concentrated on finding nutritional components that can enhance healing through supra-physiological doses, such as in the use of the amino acids arginine and carnitine. However, clinicians need to be aware that approximately 50% of patients admitted to the hospital are malnourished, requiring dietary supplementation; appropriate nutritional assessment and advice therefore should be an integral part of all wound management.

SUMMARY: This review provides an up-to-date commentary on the role of nutrition in wound care, with specific emphasis on lower limb wounds, from a historical perspective, and within it both the biomedical approach and current herbalist practices are considered.

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