

Patient information

Dietary advice for people with gallstones

This diet sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

What are gallstones?

Gallstones are small stones that can sometimes form in the gallbladder. They occur more commonly with increasing age. Obesity and pregnancy also increase the risk of developing gallstones. Rapid weight loss can also cause gallstones to form.

Do I need a special diet?

Your doctor may have advised you to follow a low-fat diet because you have gallstones. Evidence suggests that people who have gallstones should adopt a **healthy diet**, choosing lower fat options as part of a healthy diet.

Gallstones can cause pain and some people find that certain foods can be a trigger. These foods may be high in fat, but other foods may also cause a problem.

It is important that you do not completely avoid fat in your diet, as a certain amount of fat is needed by the body to avoid deficiencies. It is also virtually impossible to achieve a diet that is completely fat free.

If you are overweight, losing weight will be beneficial. However, it is important to do this gradually, as rapid weight loss has been associated with the development of gallstones. A safe weight loss of 1 - 2 lbs (0.5 to 1 kg) per week is recommended.

If you are already slim or underweight and are worried about losing weight, please ask your doctor to refer you to a Dietitian.

Please note: After a cholecystectomy (removal of the gall bladder) you do not need to follow a low fat diet. Following a healthy diet is advisable for optimal health.

A healthy balanced diet consists of:

- At least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day: 1 portion = 80g or about 1 palm-full, and may be fresh, frozen or tinned.
- A portion of starchy carbohydrates at each meal. Examples include bread, rice, cereals, pasta, potatoes, etc. Choose wholegrain varieties where possible.
- Milk and dairy products (2 - 3 portions per day). Choose low-fat dairy products.
- Protein foods 2 - 3 times per day, such as meat, fish, eggs and vegetarian alternatives such as beans and pulses.
- Limit foods high in fats and sugars.
- Make sure your diet is high in fibre: aim for 30g per day. This can be found in beans, pulses, fruit and vegetables, oats, and whole grain products, such as bread, pasta and rice.
- Drink plenty of fluid: Aim to have at least 6 - 8 glasses daily. All fluids count, avoid too many drinks with caffeine and choose no added sugar drinks.

It might be helpful to have smaller, frequent meals. Keep a food and symptom diary to identify trigger foods. Avoid these foods for a two-week trial period and note any improvements in symptoms. It is important to reintroduce foods if you do not think they are causing you problems.

Cutting down on fat

The page overleaf shows ways of reducing fat in the diet, which should be done as a part of your healthy balanced diet.

Reducing your fat intake

| Food group | Avoid or eat less of these foods | Choose these foods instead |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Fats and oils | Butter, margarine, lard, suet, cooking oils including olive oil, sunflower oil, vegetable oil | Low fat spreads, such as Flora Light®, Bertolli Light® or half fat butters Still use these sparingly |
| Cooking methods | Fried foods | Grilled, boiled, baked, poached or casseroled foods |
| Dairy products | Full cream or Jersey milk Evaporated and condensed milk Full fat cheese, such as Cheddar and Stilton Full fat soft cheese Cream Full fat yogurt Milkshakes | Semi skimmed or fully skimmed milk Low fat cheese, such as cottage cheese, Edam®, half fat hard cheeses Low fat soft cheese, such as Dairylea Light®, Laughing Cow Light®, Philadelphia Light® Low fat yogurt, such as Shape®, Muller Light®, Weight Watchers®, Activia 0%® |
| Meats and fish | Fatty and processed meat such as sausages, corned beef, beef burgers, meat pies, and tinned meat Oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, kippers, tuna in oil | Red meat (if all visible fat is removed) Chicken and turkey (remove skin) White fish, cod, haddock, plaice, tuna in brine/spring water, shellfish, salmon |
| Biscuits and cakes | Digestives, cream and chocolate biscuits, Hobnobs® Cream cakes, Danish pastries, cakes with marzipan, sponge cake | Crispbread, rice cakes, rich tea, garibaldi, morning coffee. Low fat biscuits or cakes Meringues Scones, teacakes, crumpets – avoid adding too much butter/spread Fatless sponge |
| Snack foods | Crisps, nuts, Bombay mix. Seeds (including sunflower, | Low-fat crisps, Skips®, French Fries®, Quavers®, breadsticks, |

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| | pumpkin) | Twiglets® Fruit (fresh, tinned and dried) |
| Confectionary | Chocolate, toffee, fudge, coconut | Boiled fruit sweets, mints, marshmallows, liquorice, Turkish Delight |
| Desserts | Fruit pies, fruit crumbles Milk puddings Ice-cream Gateaux | Low fat yogurts (as above) Sorbet Jelly, fruit – fresh, cooked or tinned Low fat ice-cream Low fat milk puddings, such as custard or rice pudding |
| Miscellaneous | Creamy dips, hummus, avocado pears, cream soups. Pastry foods such as quiche. Oil-based salad dressings, such as vinaigrette, mayonnaise Cream and cheese sauces Gravy made with fat or meat juices | Low fat salad dressing, salsa dips Tomato based or low fat cooking sauces. Sauces made with cornflour and low-fat milk and/or low fat cheese Gravy made with stock cubes and cornflour (if used, meat juices should have the fat drained) Low fat ready-made meals |

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