

# Dietary advice for the management of gallbladder disease

## Information for patients

### What are Gallstones?

- Gallstones occur when stones are formed from the bile that is stored and concentrated in your gallbladder (an organ that sits beneath the liver). Bile salts within the bile are released and used to break down fat entering the small intestine. Gallstones can be composed of solidified fatty cholesterol-like lumps or bile pigments or calcium deposits that have hardened. Gallstones can vary from being a mass of tiny stones to one large one.
- Gallstones are a common condition that can occasionally cause problems such as pain and inflammation. The pain is caused by irritation on the gallbladder wall (cholecystitis) or from blocking the tube that drains it (cystic duct). Gallstones may also cause yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes (jaundice) and inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis).

### Treatment for Gallstones

Surgery is the usual treatment for gallstones that cause symptoms. There is no specific diet for treating the symptoms of gallstones. Eating a healthy diet, which will naturally be lower in fat, may help to reduced symptoms. Some people find that particular foods trigger the onset of the pain. Try recording what you are eating using a food diary to help you to identify any personal triggers. You could try avoiding these foods for several weeks to see if it helps, or until you have your surgery.

Medical research has shown that healthy eating is the most effective way to manage gallbladder disease in the long term. There is no need to follow any kind of special diet after your operation, however healthy eating is always a good idea.

### The basic principles to follow for a healthy diet

- Eat the right amount to be a healthy weight. If you are overweight, try to lose weight gradually at a rate of 0.5-1kg (1-2lbs) a week.

- Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- Include low fat dairy products (2-3 portions per day).
- Limit the amount of saturated fat in the diet (found in animal products such as butter, cheese, ghee, biscuits, pastry, cakes and visible fat on meat) and replace this with small amounts of unsaturated fat (such as vegetable olive oil, rapeseed oil, avocados, nuts and seeds) (see below for practical tips to help you lower the fat in your diet)
- Include some meat, fish, eggs and alternatives (such as beans, lentils and pulses) and limit processed meats such as sausages, beef burgers, pate and pies
- Aim for a diet that is high in fibre (for example bean, pulses, lentils, fruit and vegetables, oats and whole-wheat products such as wholegrain bread, rice and pasta) (see below for practical tips to help you increase the fibre in your diet)
- If you are underweight (BMI < 18.5) or concerned that you are losing weight unintentionally, healthy eating advice may not be appropriate for you. It will be important that you eat regular meals and replace any foods you are avoiding with alternatives to help you maintain your weight. You may find it helpful to include additional snacks between meals, such as glasses of milk, beans on toast, yoghurts, cereal or cereal bar, teacakes, crumpets, malt loaf, scones, toast or crackers.

More information on healthy eating can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>

## What is a healthy weight?

**Underweight BMI <18.5**  
**Healthy Weight BMI 18.5-24.9**  
**Overweight BMI >25**

If you are unsure if your weight is healthy then you can ask your GP, Dietician or other healthcare professional or check online at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>. Alternatively you can calculate it yourself using the following equation:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)}^2}$$

## Choose a high fibre diet

- Fill up on fruit and vegetables and leave them unpeeled where possible.
- Eat the skins on potatoes.
- Include more beans and pulses, such as peas, baked beans, lentils and kidney beans.
- Add small amounts of dried fruit, nuts or seeds to cereals or to yogurt for dessert.
- Try high fibre breakfasts, such as Bran flakes, Weetabix or porridge.
- Use wholemeal or granary bread and use wholemeal flour in baking.

- Try higher fibre crackers such as wholemeal and rye crackers or crispbreads.
- Increase your fibre intake gradually and drink plenty of fluid. Aim for at least two litres (8 drinks) per day, such as water, tea, coffee, squash or herbal tea, to avoid constipation.

## Eat regularly

Aim to have three similar sized meals through the day, trying not to eat too much fat in any meal. Do not miss meals. If you eat your evening meal early, consider having a small bedtime snack such as yoghurt, fruit, bread, crackers or breakfast cereal.

## Practical tips for lowering the fat in your diet

- Remove all visible fat and skin from meat, and choose leaner cuts of meat where you can.
- Measure your oil when cooking. A good measure is about one teaspoon per person.
- Make homemade dressings using low-fat yoghurt, lemon or lime juice and herbs.
- Try to avoid processed foods and takeaways and cook at home without using readymade ingredients when possible. This will help you control how much fat goes into your food.
- Check labels for high-fat products. A product that is high in fat contains 17.5 grams or more of fat per 100 grams. Try to avoid foods with red colour coding on the label for fat. Look for foods that contain 3 grams of fat or less.
- Try not to fry food. Bake, steam, boil, grill or roast on a drip tray instead, or try using a non-stick pan.
- Bulk out meals with vegetables, pulses (peas, beans and lentils) or a meat substitute. For example a cottage pie, reduce the amount of meat by adding a meat substitute mince such as soya mince or Quorn™, lentils or mushrooms.

If you have any queries contact:

### **Nutrition and Dietetic Services**

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