

Patient information

Dietary Advice for Gallstones

Nutrition and Dietetics - Therapies Department Aintree Hospital

What does the gall bladder do?

The main purpose of the gall bladder is to store and concentrate bile.

The bile is drained from the liver into the gallbladder and is stored until it is needed for digestion. When a meal is eaten, the gallbladder is able to release bile into the digestive system when it is required to help digest the fat from the food that has been eaten.

What are gallstones?

Gallstones are very common. They are small stones, usually made of cholesterol, that form in the gallbladder. Most gallstones do not cause any trouble and you may have them without knowing.

However, in a small number of cases, gallstones can irritate the gallbladder or cause a blockage so that bile cannot enter the gut, or move out of the gall bladder and into other parts of the body.

This **may** lead to a range of symptoms, such as:

- a sudden intense pain in your abdomen
- nausea and vomiting
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes)
- diarrhoea or pale, greasy stools.

What are the risk factors for gallstones?

Known risk factors for gallstones include:

- Age: the older a person is, the more likely they are to develop gallstones.
- Sex: women are two to three times more likely to develop gallstones than men.
- Obesity.

Will a special diet help gallstones?

Most people do not need to change their diet, but please try to avoid any food and drink that you feel may trigger your symptoms.

Some people find foods very high in fat can cause an increase in symptoms, if this is the case a reduction in high fat foods may help in the short term only.

What is important is to eat as healthily as possible. If you are overweight, losing some weight may help. The following pages discuss what is meant by a healthy diet. If you have had your gallbladder, or gallstones removed there is no need to continue with any restrictions. Just return to your normal intake. Please seek further advice from your GP if you feel eating or drinking triggers any previous or new symptoms to develop after recovering from having your gallbladder or gallstones removed.

Healthy Eating

Following a healthy diet may not cure gallstones or completely eliminate symptoms, but it can help control the pain that is caused by gallstones.

- Base your meals on starchy food.
- Eat lots of fruit and veg.
- Eat more fish – especially oily varieties.
- Cut down on fat.
- Try to eat less salt.
- Get active and try to be a healthy weight.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Don't skip meals.

The Eat Well Plate

All the food we eat can be divided into five groups. In a healthy diet you eat the right balance of these groups. To maintain a healthy diet, the Eatwell Guide shows you how much of what you eat should come from each food group, this is shown below:



Potato, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

- Plan your meals/ snacks around starchy foods such as bread, chapattis, breakfast cereals, potatoes, rice, noodles, oats, pasta etc.
- Choose high fibre varieties where possible e.g. wholemeal bread, high fibre cereal (wholegrain wheat), wholemeal pasta, skins on potatoes.
- Aim to include one food from this group at each meal time – these foods should provide the bulk of your meal.

Fruit and Vegetables

- Have at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Remember that fresh, frozen, dried, canned and juices all count towards your total.
- Eat a variety of different types and colours of fruit and vegetables.

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

- Choose moderate amounts of lean meat, fish, eggs and pulses such as beans and lentils.
- Remove the skin from chicken, excess fat from meat and avoid frying.
- Try to include two portions of fish each week, one of which should be an oily fish (e.g. mackerel, trout, sardines, kippers, and fresh tuna).

Dairy and alternative

- Aim for three portions of dairy foods per day. A portion is 1/3 pint of milk, a small pot of yogurt or a small (matchbox size) piece of cheese.
- Try to choose reduced fat versions where you can, e.g. semi skimmed or skimmed milk, “diet” or “light” yogurts, Edam, cottage cheese and half fat Cheddar.

Limit your intake of foods containing fat and sugar

- Choose low fat or reduced sugar foods where possible.
- When using a spreading fat choose one that is high in monounsaturated fatty acids, e.g. spreads made from olive oil or rapeseed oil.

Meal and Snack Ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal (e.g. Weetabix, Branflakes, Shredded Wheat, Shreddies, Cheerio's, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies) with semi skimmed milk/ (low fat) yoghurt, try adding chopped fresh or dried fruit.
- Toast with a scraping of margarine/low fat spread and or marmalade/ jam/ marmite/ yeast extract.

- Toast with grilled tomatoes and mushrooms.
- Baked beans, scrambled/poached, or boiled egg on toast.
- Toast with grilled lean bacon with grilled mushrooms and tomatoes.
- Mixed fruit and plain yoghurt.
- Bagel or teacake with a scraping of margarine/ butter/ low fat spread.
- Wholegrain cereal bar and a piece of fruit.

Light meals

- Sandwiches using medium sliced bread or try bread rolls, pitta bread, tortilla wraps or crusty bread. Use fillings such as fish, meat, egg, cottage cheese, or low fat cheese spread. Include lettuce, tomatoes and cucumber or onion or a small side salad with your sandwich.
- Toast with one of the following, baked beans, grated cheese and tomato, sardines, mackerel, cottage cheese, poached/ boiled/ scrambled e.g. mushrooms.
- Medium-sized jacket potato. Try the following fillings - baked beans, stir fry vegetables or cottage cheese (plain, with pineapple or chives), sweetcorn and/or tuna.
- Pasta or rice salad.
- Soup with bread, try adding extra vegetables to the soup.
- Omelette - try with tomato, sweetcorn, mushroom, onion and herb, stir fried vegetables, or cheese serve with bread.
- Large mixed salad with lean meat or fish and bread, potato or pasta.

Hints for Healthy Weight Loss

There is no quick and effortless route to healthy weight control. The key is to reduce the energy (calories) and increase the calories you use up. The most effective way is by gradual change towards a healthy, low-fat diet and a more active lifestyle.

To help you on the right track, look at the hints below

- Set realistic goals. As a guide you should aim to lose 5-10% of your initial weight.
- **Don't** aim to lose weight too quickly. This can exacerbate gallstones. The maximum rate for safe weight loss is usually 0.5 -1.0kg per week (one to two pounds per week).
- It may help to keep a diary of everything you eat and drink for a few days. This will help you identify areas for improvement.

- Make gradual lifestyle changes, e.g., One to two at a time. You are much more likely to stick with them than if you try to change everything at once.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Eat regular meals. **Do not** skip meals as this often leads to overeating later in the day. Try to choose low fat, high fibre, low sugar options .
- Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Keep alcoholic drinks to a minimum.
- Be more active.

If you have lost a significant amount of weight over a short period of time due to gallstones, please consider contacting your GP for a referral to see a dietitian in the community.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

Aintree University Hospital Dietitians
Tel: 0151 529 3473

- **Guts UK**
Advice and information on digestive disorders
Tel: 0207486 0341
Website: www.gutscharity.org.uk
- **The British Liver Trust**
National charity working to reduce the impact of liver disease in the UK
Tel: 0800 652 7330
Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
- **NHS Choices**
Website: www.nhs.uk

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