

Patient information

High Energy, High Protein, Low Salt Diet for Liver Disease

Nutrition and Dietetics - Therapies

When your liver is not working well, your body needs extra calories and protein. This is because your liver may not be able to digest or store enough energy to fuel your body between meals.

People with liver disease are sometimes not able to eat enough because of symptoms like

- Feeling full quickly, especially if you have ascites (fluid around your abdomen)
- Feeling sick or vomiting
- General loss of appetite

If you do not eat enough, you may notice that you begin to lose weight, your muscles become weaker and you are less able to fight infection. Other symptoms of liver disease like ascites, oedema (extra fluid on the legs or arms) or encephalopathy (confusion) might get worse.

If you have a poor appetite or have lost weight, consuming smaller, more frequent meals and snacks throughout the day can help. Signs that you have lost weight include your clothes, jewellery or watch becoming too loose. You may also notice that you lose muscle from your arms, legs or across your chest.

If you are losing weight without meaning to or have a poor appetite, then reducing your salt intake may not be appropriate for you. Speak to your Dietitian or Doctor if you are worried about your weight.

You may be advised to limit your fluid intake to help to reduce your ascites. You should check this with your doctor before reducing how much you drink.

Salt

Adapting your diet can help to reduce your ascites or oedema. If your diet contains large amounts of foods very high in salt, reducing your consumption of these foods may also help reduce fluid retention. Most of the salt we eat comes from processed foods, such as soups, ready meals, snacks and processed meats.

How can I reduce my salt intake?

- Avoid adding salt to food. Try flavouring your foods with herbs, spices, garlic and lemon instead of salt.
- Use fewer tinned, packet soups if possible. Try home-made soups if possible.
- Choose reduced salt tinned foods like beans or vegetables. Frozen vegetables are lower in salt. Tinned fish in water, oil or tomato sauce is better than in fish in brine.
- Limit your intake of cured meats such as salami, ham, bacon, and sausages. Try cold, cooked fresh meat, poultry or eggs instead.
- Full-fat hard cheese is an excellent source of protein, so it is a good idea to include it in your diet but not every day as the salt content is high.
- Ready meals and sauces are high in salt so try to look out for low salt alternatives or have these less often. Pasta and 'cook-in' sauces can be used if no other salt is added to the meal.
- Choose unsalted butter/margarine.
- Try to avoid highly salted nuts, crisps, and crackers.
- If you use 'take-away' foods, try to avoid adding extra salt to these.

Food Labelling

Looking at food labels can help you to see how much salt is in your food. Look at the figure for salt per 100g as this will give you an idea if the food is high in salt. Some labels also give the figure for salt as sodium.

High = more than 1.5g salt per 100g (0.6g sodium per 100g)

Low = 0.3g salt or less per 100g (or 0.1 g sodium per 100g)

If the amount of salt or sodium is between these figures then that is a 'moderate level' of salt and these foods are okay to have the majority of the time.

Traffic light labelling can help you to control your salt intake – choose foods with green or amber labels most of the time.

Reduced Salt Snack Ideas

- Fruit with cream/ice cream
- Biscuits (e.g. rich tea, jam filled biscuits, wafer biscuits, custard creams, shortbread)
- Plain unsalted crackers with cream/cottage cheese
- Cake with custard or cream
- Cereal (except bran cereals) with full cream milk
- Toast (maximum of four slices of bread per day) with unsalted butter/margarine

- Sandwiches filled with fresh/roast meat or chicken, cream cheese, egg, or tuna tinned in oil. Try sweet fillings like jam, honey or lemon curd.
- Full fat yoghurts
- Glasses of full cream milk
- Unsalted nuts
- Boiled sweet, fruit pastilles, wine gums.
- Ice cream

Making sure that you eat enough calories.

People with liver disease need to eat more calories and protein than others to make sure that they do not lose weight or muscle mass.

The following tips may be helpful when planning your meals to make sure that you are eating enough:

- Try to have three portions of protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs or beans per day.
- Try snacking on cakes, sweets, chocolate and desserts as they contain large amounts of energy.
- If you are feeling full when you eat, try using small frequent meals and snacks instead of worrying about eating larger meals.
- **Try to enrich foods with extra calories, for example:**
 - Add full cream milk/cream to cereals or fruit-based desserts.
 - Add unsalted butter or margarine to vegetables, pasta, sauces, desserts, toast, unsalted crackers or potatoes.
 - Add cream cheese or cottage cheese to foods wherever possible.
e.g. home-made soups, toast or unsalted crackers
 - Add sugar to foods e.g. cereals, hot drinks.
 - Add honey, jam, or syrup to breakfast cereals, milk puddings or other desserts.

You should speak to your doctor or dietitian if you find that cutting down on salt means that you are no longer eating well or that you are losing weight.

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

Nutrition and Dietetics Department
Aintree Hospital
Tel: 0151 529 3473

Royal Liverpool Hospital
Tel: 0151 706 2120

British Liver Trust
Web: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
Tel: 0800 652 7330

NHS Choices
Alcohol-related Liver Disease
Web: www.nhs.uk (search alcohol-related liver disease).

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