

Dietary advice for gallstones

i Information for patients
Sheffield Dietetics



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What are gallstones?

Gallstones are small stones that can sometimes form in the gallbladder. Most people with gallstones will not be aware they have them but sometimes they can cause problems such as pain, jaundice, pancreatitis and inflammation of the gallbladder. Gallstones are more common as you get older and obesity, diabetes, pregnancy, rapid weight loss and certain medications can also increase the risk of developing gallstones.

What can be done about gallstones?

If your symptoms are more severe and occur frequently, surgery to remove the gallstones or the gallbladder (cholecystectomy) is usually recommended. Whilst you are waiting for surgery, or if surgery is not suitable for you, it may help to avoid any foods that cause you symptoms.

Should I follow a special diet for gallstones?

There is no specific diet for treating symptoms of gallstones. However, eating a healthy balanced diet that is naturally lower in fat may help reduce symptoms, as well as improving your general health. If you are overweight, losing weight gradually will also help. A safe weight loss of 2lb or 1kg a week is recommended.

A healthy balanced diet includes:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables. Aim to have at least five portions each day; these can be fresh, tinned or frozen.
- Basing your meals on starchy carbohydrates, such as bread, rice, cereals, pasta, potatoes, chapattis and plantain. Choose wholegrain varieties when possible.
- Some low fat milk and dairy products (2-3 portions per day).
- Some meat, fish, eggs and alternatives such as beans, lentils and pulses. Try to include fish twice a week.
- Limited amounts of foods high in fats and sugars.
- Limit saturated fat that is found in animal products, such as butter, ghee, cheese, meat, cakes, biscuits and pastries. Replace these with unsaturated fats found in vegetable oils, such as sunflower, rapeseed and olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds.
- Aim for a diet that is high in fibre. This can be found in beans, pulses, fruit and vegetables, oats, and wholewheat products, such as wholewheat bread, pasta and brown rice.
- Drink plenty of fluid - at least 6-8 glasses per day; all non-alcoholic drinks count, but water and low fat milk are good choices.

The Eatwell Guide on the next page shows all the different food groups. It suggests how much of each we need in our overall diet. You do not need to achieve this balance with every meal but try to get the balance right over a day or even a week. More information is available on the NHS Choices website:

(<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx>)

Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy	Fat	Saturated Fat	Salt
1000kcal	3.0g	1.3g	0.9g
LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%
			15%

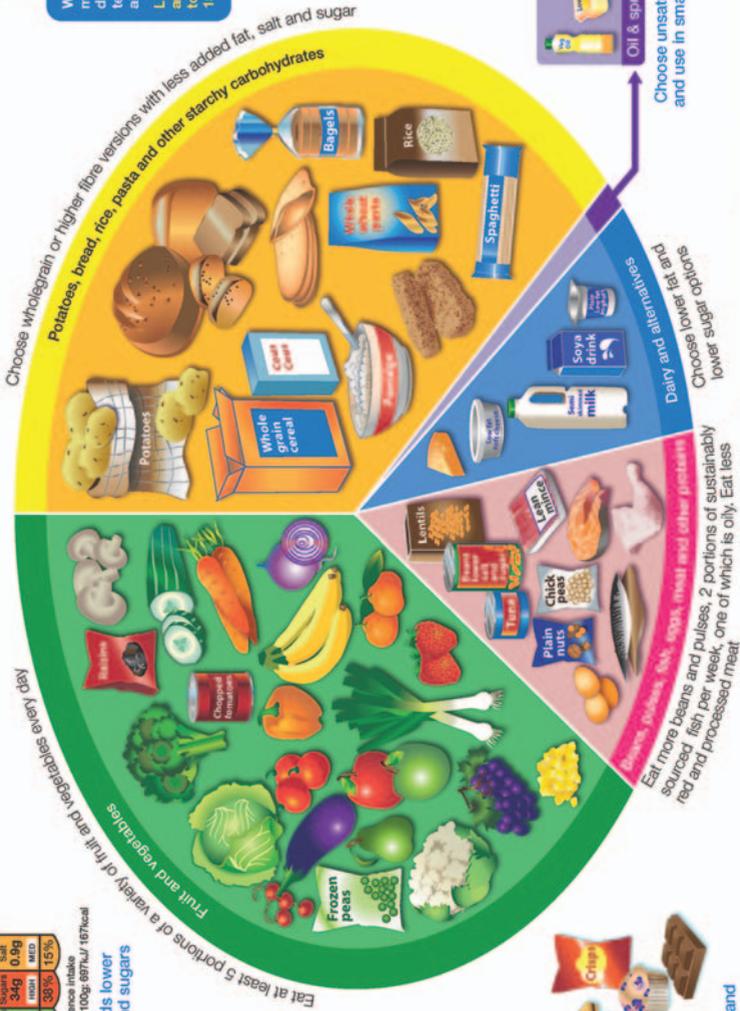
Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kcal / 167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars



Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.



Eat less often and in small amounts

Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland © Crown copyright 2016

Some people find that specific foods can trigger symptoms. If you find this, try to keep a food and symptom diary to identify your trigger foods. You can then avoid these foods for a two-week trial period to see if you have any improvements in symptoms.

Fatty foods cause me symptoms; how can I reduce the amount of fat I eat?

A high-fat diet and fatty foods can sometimes cause discomfort and painful symptoms. They may also cause steatorrhoea (fatty stools), which are oily, pale and smelly.

Steatorrhoea is a sign that fat is not being digested properly. You may find it helpful to reduce the fat in your diet. Try to do this gradually as cutting out large amounts of fat (and therefore calories) can cause rapid weight loss which may make your symptoms worse. Remember to replace the foods you are cutting out to help keep your diet balanced and control your weight. For example, replace a slice of cake with a slice of toast with low fat spread and honey or jam.

If there is no improvement in your symptoms do not forget to reintroduce the foods you have excluded. If you are concerned about losing weight it may also be helpful to try smaller more frequent meals.

Practical tips to eat less fat

Adopting some healthy habits can reduce the amount of fat you eat. Here are some tips you can use during cooking and food preparation.

- Try to avoid processed foods and takeaways and cook from scratch 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.
- Use a low calorie spray or oil spray when cooking, or wipe off extra oil using a paper towel.
- Measure your oil when cooking, rather than pouring it. A good measure is about one teaspoon per person.
- Try to use fat or oil in food only when it is absolutely necessary; using a non-stick pan may help.
- Bulk out meals with vegetables, pulses or a meat substitute, for example a cottage pie or Bolognese could be made with half the amount of meat by adding meat substitute mince such as soya mince or Quorn, lentils or mushrooms.
- If you are cooking meat that is sticking to the pan, a small drop of water may help rather than adding more oil.
- Make your own dressings using low-fat yoghurt, lemon or lime juice and herbs.
- Remove all visible fat and skin from meat, and choose leaner cuts of meat.
- Skim fat off the top of casseroles and stews.

Knowing which foods are high in fat can also help you make healthier choices around food. The table below shows which foods are high in fat and their lower fat alternatives.

High-fat foods	Lower-fat foods
Butter, lard, ghee, oils, spreads	Reduced or lower-fat/light spreads, oil sprays for cooking
Whole milk, cream, full-fat yoghurts, ice cream, evaporated or condensed milk	Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, half-fat crème fraîche, low-fat evaporated milk, low-fat or fat-free yoghurt, soya milk or yoghurt
Full-fat cheese, such as Cheddar, Brie and Stilton	Cottage cheese, light soft cheeses and cheese spreads, reduced-fat Cheddar cheese or naturally lower-fat cheeses such as mozzarella and ricotta (matchbox-sized portion)
Meats and processed meats, such as sausages, salami, corned beef, bacon, gammon, pork, lamb, beef mince, beefburgers, meat pies, fish tinned in oil	Chicken, turkey, lean ham, lean or extra lean beef mince, turkey mince, red meat with visible fat cut off, and white fish, such as cod, haddock, pollock, and fish tinned in brine or water
Starchy foods, such as pastry, chips, roast potatoes, pasta in creamy/cheese sauce	Bread, rice, pasta, cereals, potatoes
Fruit – avocado pear, coconut	Any
Vegetables that are roasted, fried and in oily dressings	All vegetables and salad

High-fat foods	Lower-fat foods
Puddings, such as cakes, pies, ice cream and custards	Jelly, sugar-free jelly, low-fat custard, rice pudding made with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, sorbet, tinned or stewed fruit, low-fat yoghurts
Sauces and dressings, such as mayonnaise, salad cream, white sauce, cheese sauce and creamy sauces	Light mayonnaise or salad cream, vinaigrettes, mustard, lemon juice, fat-free salad dressings, tomato-based sauces (some can contain oil), salsa, balsamic dressing
Snacks, such as cakes, biscuits, pastries, crisps and nuts, chocolate, toffee, fudge	Toasted teacakes, low-fat popcorn, dried fruit, meringues, rice cakes, rich tea biscuits, low-fat crisps such as Quavers or Skips, marshmallows, Turkish delight

When can I go back to my normal diet?

Following a healthy balanced diet is something that you should aim to do lifelong. However, if you have had to limit your diet to help with gallstone symptoms you should be able to tolerate all foods after surgery to remove your gallbladder or gallstones.

If you are not suitable for surgery and are having to avoid a number of foods, please ask your doctor to refer you to the dietitian who can assess your diet and ensure it is balanced.

Should I follow a healthy eating diet when I am already underweight?

You may have to reduce the fat in your diet to help improve your symptoms. However, if you are already underweight or are trying to put on weight, this can cut out a lot of energy from your diet.

It is important to replace the energy you would have been getting from the fat with other foods to help keep your weight steady. High fat foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese are also good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals so if you are reducing these it is important to replace them with a lower fat alternative.

If you are underweight or struggling to maintain your weight it is important to eat more regularly. The tips below may help:

- Aim for five to six small meals a day with snacks if possible
- Have high protein foods such as lean meat, fish, soya, reduced fat dairy, lentils and pulses in 3-4 snacks or meals each day
- Aim to have one pint of skimmed or semi-skimmed milk each day
- Avoid drinks with meals, as these can make you feel full more quickly. If you need to drink at mealtimes choose skimmed or semi-skimmed milk or fruit juice as these are more nutritious

What snacks can I have?

You may find the following snack ideas useful:

- Teacake, crumpet, malt loaf, scone or toast with low fat spread, jam, syrup or honey
- Crackers with low fat cream cheese or reduced fat hummus
- Soup
- Cereal or porridge made with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk – add plenty of sugar, honey or a handful of dried fruit
- Low fat yoghurt with honey, fruit puree, tinned or fresh fruit
- Scrambled egg on toast or baked beans on toast
- Smoothie made with semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk or low fat yoghurt
- Soya yoghurt
- Sweet popcorn
- Dried fruit

If you continue to struggle with your weight ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian who will be able to assess your diet and give you further advice.

It may be necessary to have nutritional supplement drinks to help you maintain your weight. Your doctor or dietitian will be able to advise you on this.

Contact details:

This information was given to you by

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Telephone number



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