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Eating well when you have gallstones or inflammation of the gallbladder

Nutrition & Dietetic Service

Information for Patients

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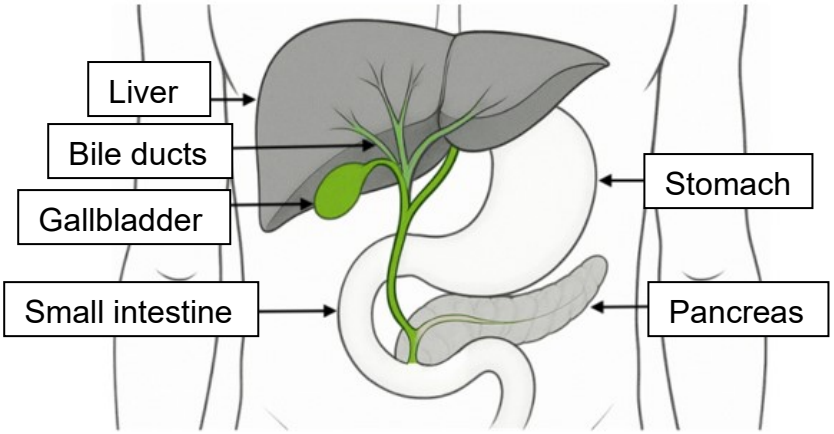
What does the gallbladder do?

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ under your liver. It stores, concentrates and releases bile. Bile is a digestive liquid made by the liver.

When we eat, bile is released from the gallbladder into the small intestine. It helps to digest and absorb the fat and fat-soluble vitamins that we eat and drink.



What are gallstones?

Gallstones are small, hard stones that can form in the gallbladder. They are made from cholesterol, bile pigments or calcium deposits. They can form when the gallbladder does not empty often enough, or when there is too much cholesterol in the bile.

Gallstones are more common in women. They are also more likely to form as we get older. Obesity, smoking and pregnancy can increase the risk of developing gallstones. Losing weight too quickly can also cause gallstones to form. Most people with gallstones do not develop any symptoms.

What is cholecystitis?

Cholecystitis is inflammation of the gallbladder. This usually happens when a gallstone causes a blockage in the bile duct. This is a tube that connects the gallbladder to the small intestine. This can make it difficult for bile to be released to support digestion of food. When this happens, it can lead to stomach (abdominal) pain/ discomfort, bloating, feeling sick (nausea) and being sick (vomiting).

Do I need to follow a special diet?

There is no special diet for gallstones or cholecystitis. Your doctor may have advised you to follow a low-fat diet. This can help some people, but it is not needed by everyone. Most people should follow a healthy, balanced diet.

Gallstones can cause pain. Some people find that certain foods make their symptoms worse. These foods may be high in fat, but other foods can also trigger symptoms.

Dietary fat in food makes the gallbladder squeeze to release bile. For some people, this can make symptoms worse. However, eating some fat is important. It helps the gallbladder empty and may reduce the risk of stones building up in the gallbladder or bile duct.

Healthy eating to maintain your weight

The Eatwell Guide shows how to follow a healthy, balanced diet. This can help you manage symptoms and may lower the risk of problems linked to gallstones or gallbladder disease.



www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/

There are 5 main food groups:

1. starchy carbohydrates
2. fruits and vegetables
3. dairy and alternatives
4. foods rich in protein
5. oils and spreads

Try to choose a variety of different foods from each group so you have the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.

- Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day
- Base meals around starchy carbohydrates. Choose wholegrains where possible such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, and other starchy foods.
- Include a source of protein with mealtimes such as beans, pulses, fish (aim for 2 portions a week. 1 should be oily), lean meats and other protein foods.
- Have some dairy or alternatives. Choose lower fat, lower sugar products where possible, for example, semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk, reduced-fat cheese or plain low fat yogurt. If using alternatives, make sure these are fortified with calcium.
- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads. Eat small amounts such as vegetable oils and spreads.
- Limit your intake of foods and drinks high in fat and/ or sugar and salt, including deep-fried foods, pastries and pies and fried snacks
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids. Aim for 6 to 8 cups or glasses a day such as water, no added sugar squash.

Body Mass Index (BMI):

BMI is a common way to check whether your weight is healthy for your height.

CATEGORY	BMI
Underweight	<18.5kg/m^2
Healthy weight	18.5-24.9kg/m^2
Overweight	25-29.9kg/m^2
Obesity class 1	30-34.9kg/m^2
Obesity class 2	35-39.9kg/m^2
Obesity class 3	>40kg/m^2

https://www.nhs.uk/health-assessment-tools/calculate-your-body-mass-index/calculate-bmi-for-adults

What if I am overweight?

- If you are overweight, losing weight can help. It is best to lose weight slowly, as losing weight too quickly may raise your risk of gallstones.
- A safe weight loss of 1 to 2 lbs (0.5 to 1kg) per week is recommended.
- Fat is an essential part of a balanced diet. It should account for about 30 to 35% of energy intake. It is recommended that those with gallbladder problems eat within the healthy eating principles shown on the ‘Eat Well Guide’.

What if I have my gallbladder removed (cholecystectomy)?

After a cholecystectomy, you do not need to follow a special diet. Your liver will continue to produce bile. It will drip into the bowel all the time rather than being stored in the gallbladder. It is important that you eat well to recover from your surgery, and return to eating a healthy, varied diet in the long-term.

More tips to help manage symptoms:

- Eat little and often. Missing meals and fasting reduces gallbladder emptying. This can increase the risk of stones forming or enlarging
- Eat breakfast soon after you wake up. Your liver makes bile while you sleep. This bile contains a lot of cholesterol. Bile acids help dissolve the cholesterol so it stays in the bile instead of forming crystals or stones.
- If you find there is a link between fat intake and your symptoms, try eating less fat to see if you notice an improvement:
    - Buy low fat versions of foods.
    - Choose foods containing less than 3g of total fat per 100g. This will be foods labelled green in the ‘traffic light’ system.
    - Try microwaving, steaming, poaching, boiling, or grilling rather than roasting or frying.
    - Limit your use of oils and butter. Use small amounts of oil sprays and low-fat spreads instead.
    - Take visible skin and fat off meat/ poultry before cooking.
- If you feel sick, try the following tips:
    - Eat small amounts but often, such as dry bread/ toast, crackers, or plain biscuits.
    - Choose cold food options. They tend to have milder smells and are often easier to manage.
    - Speak with your doctor or pharmacist about anti-sickness medication if it is affecting your eating and drinking.
    - However, if you have symptoms after your surgery, such as; urgency to poo, lack of control, bloating, tummy pain, farting, stomach gurgling or pale, yellow, orange, or oily stools which may float or be foul smelling (steatorrhea), speak with your doctor or dietitian. You may need more tests or advice to help you alter your diet.

- If you find there are certain foods which trigger your symptoms, you could start keeping a food and symptom diary. Record everything you eat and drink alongside the symptoms you have for a week. You can look back over your diary and make some changes to what you eat. For example: you may choose to avoid bran flakes to reduce bloating and abdominal pain.

Example of a food and symptom diary

Day: Monday Wake up 06:30am Bedtime: 10pm

Time of day/ meal	**Food/ drink**	**Amount taken**	**Symptoms (tummy pain, feeling sick, being sick. Describe poo, frequency of pooing, sudden urges to poo).**
Breakfast **7am**	Bran flakes Full fat milk Banana Tea	6 tablespoons ½ cup 1 medium 1 cup	Bloating and tummy (abdominal) pain for 3 hours (intermittent/constant)
Mid-morning	Orange juice Weetabix	250ml 2	
Lunch **12:30pm**	Roast chicken Carrot Onion Gravy	 8 tablespoons 6 tablespoons 3 tablespoons	
Mid-afternoon **3pm**	Full fat milk	250ml	Watery soft poo about 30min after
Dinner **6pm**	Sausage Mash	3 sausages 4 tablespoons	Mild tummy (abdominal) pain for 1 hour
Supplements/Medication	Complan shake Full fat milk	1 sachet 200ml	

What if I am losing weight?

If you are losing weight without trying because gallstones have affected your appetite, you may need to follow a high-energy diet. This can help you keep your weight stable or gain weight slowly. Try these tips:

- Eat and drink little and often. Aim for 4 to 6 smaller, snack type meals.
- Use a smaller plate and keep the portions small.
- Avoid filling up on low energy, filling foods such as fruit and vegetables, unless they are served with high energy foods like cream, ice-cream or cheese sauce.
- Choose high protein foods where possible to support recovery such as meat, fish, beans, lentils, cheese and milk.
- Milk is a nourishing drink. Choose full fat milk as it has a high calorie content than semi-skimmed milk. Examples include: glass of full fat milk, milky coffee, hot chocolate, lassi, Indian tea, or Complan between meals.
- Add extra butter, oil, or ghee to your meal at lunch or dinner
- Try to avoid low energy fluids such as water, tea, or coffee before meal times.
- Choose milky puddings such as rice pudding, custard or shrikhand with extra cream.

If eating more fat increases your symptoms and you are losing weight, please speak with your medical team who can refer you to a Dietitian.

Weight tracker

Use the table below to record your weight.

Date	Weight

Contact details

If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Dietitians on:

0116 258 5400.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice
Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net

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