



Dietary Advice for People with Gallstones

Building healthier lives

UHB is a no smoking Trust

What are Gallstones?

The gallbladder is a small pouch-like organ under the liver that stores liquid called bile. Bile is used to help the body digest fat. When it is needed the gallbladder pushes bile into a tube (called the bile duct) and carries it to the small intestine to help with digestion. Gallstones form when the bile hardens into pieces of solid stone/ pebble-like material. These 'stones' vary in size. They can cause blockages of the bile duct or inflammation, causing pain, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or eyes) and a temperature.

Current Recommendations

People with gallstones are often told to avoid fat. However, there is no evidence to support the use of very low fat diets. Current research suggests adopting a healthy lifestyle that includes:

- Take regular exercise
- Maintain a healthy weight
- If you are pursuing weight loss, do this gradually rather than rapid weight loss
- Stop smoking
- Eat a variety of foods from all food groups

What is a healthy weight?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to check you are a healthy weight for your height. A healthy BMI is between 20-25 kg/m². To calculate your BMI, divide your weight (kg) by your height (m) squared. If you are having difficulty, ask your practice nurse to calculate it for you.

A waist circumference greater than 80cm (32in) for women and 94cm (37in) for men suggests that their body fat is likely to increase their risk of health problems. The greatest risk is for women with a waist measurement of more than 88cm (35in) and men with a waist measurement of more than 102cm (40in).

How can I lose weight sensibly?

- Rapid weight loss and significantly restricting calories can also lead to formation of gallstones, therefore aim to lose weight gradually. A safe rate for weight loss is 0.5–1kg (1–2 lbs) per week
- Eat regular meals, including breakfast as this is proven to help control your weight
- Include exercise – Government recommendations are 20 minutes moderate activity, five times per week
- Don't follow fad diets as these are usually nutritionally unbalanced. To lose weight and manage weight maintenance it is important to follow long-term lifestyle changes
- Seek help from supportive friends and family
- Occasional lapses are normal. So don't give up if you have a bad day
- Check your weight just once per week (daily changes show fluid) or measure your weight loss by checking your waist circumference

Healthy Eating Ideas

Breads/ rice/ potatoes/ cereals/ pasta

- 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

Meat, fish, eggs and beans

- 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 avoiding 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)

Milk and Dairy Foods

- Aim for 3 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" yogurt, 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 mono-unsaturated fatty acids, e.g. spreads made from olive oil or rapeseed oil

Alcohol

The newest guidelines advise men and woman not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. It is also advised to spread your consumption of alcohol over 3 or more days if you are regularly having 14 units per week. 1 unit is equivalent to: one small glass of wine; half a pint of normal strength beer, lager, cider; or a single pub measure of spirits. Try to include 2-3 alcohol free days per week.

Food Labels

For foods where you eat the whole item, for example a ready meal or sandwich use per serving on the label. For snack type foods use the per 100g amount.

	Low	Medium	High
Sugar	Less than 5g	5.1g-22.5g	More than 22.5g
Fat	Less than 3.0g	3.1g-19.9g	More than 20.0g
Saturated Fat	Less than 1.5g	1.6g-4.9g	More than 5.0g
Fibre	Less than 0.5g	0.6g-2.9g	More than 3.0g
Sodium	0.0g-0.1g	0.1g-0.6g	More than 0.6g

If you experience on-going symptoms contact your GP for a referral to see a Dietitian for further nutrition and dietetic support.

Further resources and sources of help

www.gutscharity.org.uk/

www.nhs.uk/conditions/gallstones/?src=conditionswidget

www.bda.uk.com/

Contact us

Dietetics and Nutrition

Birmingham Heartlands, Good Hope and Solihull Hospitals

0121 424 3674

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham

0121 627 2000

Email: **Health.InformationCentre@uhb.nhs.uk**

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

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If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email **interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk**.

Dietetics and Nutrition
University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
