

Eating Guidelines for Gallbladder Disease

Your liver produces bile that helps you digest and absorb fat and fat-soluble vitamins. The gallbladder stores this bile and releases it into your intestine when you eat. Particles in the bile, usually cholesterol, sometimes stick together and form hard stones called gallstones. Most of the time, gallstones do not cause symptoms. When they do cause symptoms, the gallbladder is usually removed. This is called a cholecystectomy.

This fact sheet provides information on what you can eat to reduce symptoms of gallbladder disease. It also covers what to eat after surgery.



Steps you can take

People often believe that they need to remove all fat from their diet if they have gallbladder disease. This is usually not necessary. Following a very low fat diet can sometimes cause more stones to form. Instead, eating a diet that is lower in fat (but still has some fat) is often recommended to try and reduce symptoms.

Follow a healthy eating plan, such as Canada's Food guide <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>, to help you plan well-balanced, healthy meals and snacks. Unless your doctor gives you different advice, you can follow the tips below.

- Include a variety of vegetables and fruit. All are low in fat (except avocados) and high in nutrients your body needs.
- Choose mostly “whole grains” like oats, brown rice, quinoa, or barley. Whole grains are higher in fibre, and a high fibre diet may help to prevent more stones from forming. High fibre grain products, like bread, cereal or pasta, are those with at least 15% daily value (% DV) or four grams of fibre per serving.
- Choose lower-fat milk and milk alternatives:
 - skim and 1% milk, and fortified soy beverage
 - lower-fat yogurt (2% M.F. or less)
 - lower-fat cheese (20% M.F. or less)

- Remove the skin from poultry. Choose lean cuts of meat and remove any fat you can see. Cook meat, fish, and poultry in a way that the fat can drip away. Eat low-fat protein alternatives like lentils, beans, and tofu more often.
- Limit the fat you use at the table, such as in salad dressing, and in cooking. Use only 30-45 mL (2-3 Tbsp) of added fats each day. Healthy added fats include non-hydrogenated margarines and canola, olive and soybean oils. Avoid deep fried foods, large amounts of rich creamy sauces and gravies.
- Limit the amount of high fat desserts and snacks like cookies, store-bought baked goods and chocolate you eat. These are high in fat and low in the nutrients your body needs.

Some people find certain foods make their symptoms worse. If you have symptoms that come and go, try keeping a food journal where you record the foods you eat and any symptoms you have. It may help you figure out which foods cause your problems. Avoid those foods until after you have surgery.

After you have surgery:

Unless your doctor tells you not to, go back to your normal diet as soon as possible. You do not need your gallbladder for normal digestion of food. Your liver still makes bile, so you can digest fat.

Some people experience diarrhea after cholecystectomy. It usually stops soon after surgery. If you have on-going diarrhea, or if it is affecting your quality of life, speak with your health care provider.



Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following:

- HealthLink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.

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