

## Nutrition and Dietetics

# Eating after a Gastrectomy

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### ***Eating after a Gastrectomy***

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There are two types of gastrectomy:

- ◆ Partial gastrectomy in which only part of the stomach is removed.
- ◆ Total gastrectomy in which the whole of the stomach is removed.

The stomach acts as a reservoir (storage place) for food. When part or all of the stomach is removed it reduces the space available for food. You may have a poor appetite, feel full quickly and have difficulty regaining or maintaining your weight. The most important advice following a gastrectomy is to eat small, frequent meals. This will help you to eat enough nutrients to prevent weight loss.

The following advice may be helpful:

#### **Eat little and often**

Aim to have 5 or 6 smaller meals or snacks throughout the day (see meal plan).

#### **Drink fluids separately from meals**

Try not to drink during your meal or for at least 30 minutes before so that you don't feel too full to eat. Aim to use nourishing drinks e.g. milk and fruit juices (instead of water, tea or coffee) especially if you are trying to gain weight.

#### **Choose soft foods for the first 4 weeks after your operation**

Soft foods may be more comfortable and easier to digest immediately after surgery until any swelling and bruising has resolved. The following foods should be avoided whilst following a soft diet:

- ◆ Tough meats/gristle
- ◆ Seeds/pips e.g. in tomatoes
- ◆ Fresh bread/hard crusts/granary or multi-grain loaves
- ◆ Hard fruit/pithy segments e.g. oranges, fruit skins, grapes

- ◆ Hard vegetables/stringy vegetables e.g. runner beans, celery

## **Include protein sources in your diet – aim for 3 portions daily**

For example meats, fish, eggs, pulses, milk and dairy products (cheese or yogurts).

## **Eat small amounts of fruit and vegetables**

These tend to be bulky and may fill you up quickly. A glass of fruit juice daily can help you get your vitamin C requirement.

## **Choose low fibre versions of cereals, rice, pasta and bread**

For example cornflakes, rice krispies, white rice/pasta/bread. Avoid whole grains as these are bulky and may fill you up too quickly.

## **If you experience symptoms of dumping syndrome** *(see dietary problems)*

Avoid large quantities of sugar/glucose rich foods and drinks.

## **Do not rush your food**

Take your time, relax and chew foods well as this will help to make it easier for you to digest your food. Avoid bending down immediately after a meal to prevent regurgitation (return of partly digested food from your stomach to your mouth).

## **Weigh yourself weekly**

If you are losing weight let your dietitian or doctor know.

## **Dietary Problems**

### **Diarrhoea**

This can be common after gastric surgery and should resolve within 1-2 months of surgery. Ask your doctor about anti-diarrhoeal medication. Ensure you have an adequate fluid intake to replace the additional losses. Try not to limit your food intake. If you find some foods particularly affect your bowels it may help to avoid these e.g. high fibre foods, but it is best not to exclude too many foods from your diet to ensure you get all the nutrients you need. Some pro-biotic containing foods may also be helpful e.g. Yakult, Actimel. If you are having chemotherapy after surgery these may not be suitable due to the chemotherapy lowering your immune system.

### **Dumping syndrome**

This is divided into two types: early and late.

**Early dumping syndrome** occurs soon after eating causing symptoms like dizziness, faintness, sweating, tummy rumblings and abdominal bloating leading to an urgent bowel motion. This occurs due to food rapidly entering the bowel.

Early dumping syndrome usually resolves within 2-3 months after surgery. It can also be helped by:

- ◆ Eating slowly and having small, frequent dry meals (take drinks 30-60 minutes after food).
- ◆ Avoiding sugary foods and drinks e.g. sugar, glucose, honey, syrups, jams and marmalade, sugary desserts, fizzy drinks, sweets, chocolate, sweet biscuits and cakes. Other types of sugar include xylitol, sorbitol, dextrose and fructose. *It is important to eat some sugars spread over the day, as these are good sources of energy (calories).*
- ◆ Sitting or lying down after a meal for 15-30 minutes may also reduce the effects of early dumping syndrome (if lying down you may need to elevate your head upwards to avoid reflux).

**Late dumping syndrome** occurs a couple of hours after meals or when a meal has been missed. Symptoms are cold sweats, palpitations, faintness or weakness and may lead to a bowel motion.

Symptoms can be relieved by eating or drinking something sweet and/or containing carbohydrate, for example bread, cracker, biscuit, chocolate, cereal, milk or sweet drink. Glucose tablets (2-4 tablets) may be helpful to take when symptoms first start.

To *prevent* symptoms follow the same advice as for early dumping syndrome – small frequent meals, eat slowly, have food and fluids separately and reduce your intake of sugary foods and drinks.

## **Reflux/Heartburn**

This may be relieved by:

- ◆ Having small, frequent meals.
- ◆ Avoiding highly spiced, acidic or irritant foods e.g. curry, fruit juices.
- ◆ Avoiding excessive (large amounts) consumption of strong tea, coffee and alcohol.
- ◆ Avoiding eating late at night.
- ◆ Avoiding bending, lifting or lying down after meals.
- ◆ Having drinks after food.

- ◆ Sleeping with your head elevated.
- ◆ Asking your doctor about antacid medicines.

## **Taste Changes**

Taste changes either having no taste or a metallic taste can occur and can last a few weeks after your operation. The following may help:

- ◆ Bland taste – add extra salt, pepper, herbs, spices (check tolerance), sugar and honey (be cautious if dumping syndrome).
- ◆ Metallic tastes – suck sweets, choose desserts, marinate meats in fruit juices, wine or serve with a strong flavoured sauce, avoid tea/coffee and use plastic/glass utensils.
- ◆ Choose cold foods as they may be more palatable.
- ◆ Try new foods or foods not normally eaten.

## **Bilious Vomiting**

This usually occurs first thing in the morning. Symptoms include stomach pains and a feeling of fullness, which is relieved by vomiting clear fluid with dark brown fluid (bile) in it. Vomiting in this way can be distressing but only lasts for a short time. Some anti-sickness drugs may be helpful. If the symptoms are severe and frequent further surgery can sometimes be considered. Eating small, frequent meals can be helpful.

## **Vitamins and Minerals**

After a gastrectomy it may be more difficult to absorb calcium leading to osteomalacia (weakening of the bones). Your doctor should monitor this and may prescribe vitamin D and calcium supplements to correct it.

Anaemia may be caused by reduced absorption of iron or by a lack of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> production following your gastrectomy. Iron supplements can be prescribed if required. If you have had a total gastrectomy you will need to have regular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> injections from your GP.

## ***Suggested meal plan***

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### **Breakfast**

- ◆ 1-2 scrambled or soft boiled egg with soft bread and butter or well buttered toast
- ◆ Cereal with full fat milk – e.g. weetabix, porridge or cornflakes **with** added sugar/honey/golden syrup/jam

**with**

- ◆ Glass of full fat/fortified milk or fruit juice (taken after food).

## **Mid Morning Snack**

Choose from the snack list

## **Lunch**

- ◆ Well-cooked chicken/casseroled meat
- ◆ Minced meat
- ◆ Fish in sauce/pie
- ◆ Eggs

**with**

- ◆ Soft vegetables/salad (add butter/cheese/salad dressing/mayonnaise)

**with**

- ◆ Potatoes (add butter, cream, full fat or fortified milk) **or** pasta/rice

## **Mid Afternoon Snack**

Choose from the snack list

## **Evening Meal**

- ◆ Small bowl of soup (make up packets with milk instead of water, and add cream, cheese, skimmed milk powder) with small soft roll and butter
- ◆ Cheese and ham omelette
- ◆ Cauliflower/macaroni cheese
- ◆ Spaghetti/ravioli/baked beans on toast with grated cheese topping (remove hard crusts)
- ◆ Pate/cream cheese on crispbread

## **Evening Snack**

(note it is advisable to wait 2-3 hours after eating/drinking before going to bed)

Choose from the snack list.

**Remember to** add gravy or sauces to add moisture and soften foods.

## **Snack Ideas**

- ◆ Hot or cold milky drink e.g. hot chocolate, Ovaltine, Horlicks or milky coffee – make with full fat milk or semi skimmed milk (to fortify add 4 tablespoons skimmed milk powder to 1 pint milk), homemade or commercial milkshakes (e.g. Build Up (Nestle), Complian (Complian Foods Ltd))
- ◆ Sponge cake/cream cake/malt loaf with butter
- ◆ Fudge
- ◆ Crisps e.g. quavers, skips
- ◆ Thick and creamy yogurt/fromage frais/mousse
- ◆ Milk pudding e.g. instant whip, rice pudding, custard
- ◆ Creme caramel
- ◆ Trifle
- ◆ Milk jelly
- ◆ Jaffa cakes
- ◆ ‘Dunked’ biscuits in a hot drink
- ◆ Crispbread with cheese spread/pate (avoid hard crackers)
- ◆ Soft sweets e.g. jelly beans, jelly babies, dolly mixture
- ◆ Bagel with butter, jam, peanut butter, cheese
- ◆ Ice-cream
- ◆ Chocolate (avoid nuts)
- ◆ Tinned fruit with cream

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