



Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Dietary advice for patients with gallstones

Information for patients

What are gallstones?

The gallbladder is a small sac lying on the underside of the liver. Bile produced by the liver is used to help digestion.

Bile is stored in the gallbladder and released into the small intestines when we eat. In some people, the levels of cholesterol (a fatty substance) in bile becomes too high, and excess cholesterol forms into stones. Gallstones can form in the gallbladder and move into the bile duct which may cause problems. There are a variety of risk factors for gallstones including aging, obesity and pregnancy.

For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/gallstones/causes/

What symptoms do gallstones cause?

Gallstones don't usually cause any symptoms, but if a gallstone blocks one of the bile ducts, it can cause sudden severe abdominal (tummy) pain and discomfort after eating.

Do I need to change my diet if I have gallstones?

The following advice is based on current evidence for the management of gallstones but also may help to manage gallbladder associated symptoms, such as biliary colic or episodes of cholecystitis. A healthy, balanced diet can help reduce the risk of further gallstone formation and may help ease symptoms for some. This includes:

- **Eating regular meals:** Avoid skipping meals, as fasting may reduce gallbladder emptying and increase stone formation. It is particularly important to eat breakfast following a period of fasting overnight.
- **Including dietary fibre:** Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, and include wholegrains. The following link contains useful information about including more fibre in your diet, www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html
- **Maintaining a moderate fat intake:** Some fat is essential for health and for stimulating gallbladder emptying, so don't remove fat completely. Reducing very high saturated fat foods may help your symptoms. Swap saturated fats for more unsaturated fats (e.g. olive, rapeseed, avocado). The following link contains useful

information about choosing the right types of fat,
www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/healthy-living/healthy-eating/fats-explained

- **If overweight, aim for gradual weight loss:** Losing weight slowly (no more than 1kg or 2lbs per week) is safer and less likely to worsen gallstone problems. Limiting refined sugar, processed and high saturated fat foods can help with this.
Very low-calorie diets should only be followed under medical supervision as rapid weight loss is a risk factor for gallstones.
- **If you are underweight or have had recent unintentional weight loss:** We would not recommend any dietary restrictions at this time as the priority is to ensure we are not increasing your risk of malnutrition.
- **Drink plenty of water, and keep within safe alcohol limits.** For more information, visit www.drinkaware.co.uk/
- **There are certain foods that some people find make their symptoms worse** (e.g. spicy and acidic foods). If they are an issue for you, we would only recommend reducing these in the short-term until symptoms improve.

Do I need a diet change if my gallbladder is removed?

- If you have a cholecystectomy (removal of the gall bladder), you should be able to tolerate all foods and can return to a normal diet.
- However, if symptoms continue, discuss with your GP or dietitian.
- If you experience ongoing diarrhoea, and especially if you have oily or pale stools (steatorrhoea), it may be due to bile acid malabsorption. In this case:
 - Seek medical advice.
 - If bile acid malabsorption is diagnosed, you may need bile acid binders and monitoring of fat-soluble vitamins. A dietitian can give you advice on managing this. For more information, visit <https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/bile-acid-diarrhoea/>

What should I eat if I am in a lot of pain?

If the above dietary advice does not help alleviate pain or if you experience sudden or severe pain, seek medical advice.

Further advice

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/dietary-management-of-gallstones-future-possibilities.html>

<https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/gallstones/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Produced by: Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Dietitians, March 2026
Next review due: March 2028.