

PATIENT INFORMATION

Healthy Eating for People with Gallstones

Information for people with gallstones

The gallbladder is a small organ which stores and releases bile. Bile is a liquid made by the liver which helps the body to digest fat and fat soluble vitamins from the food we eat. When we eat, the gallbladder contracts to release the stored bile, allowing it to mix with food. If there are stones in the gallbladder, or it is inflamed, this may cause pain. Gallstones are composed of bile pigment, calcium salts and cholesterol. They may exist for many years without causing symptoms. However, they may cause pain and/or jaundice (yellow skin).

Can diet help?

A healthy diet will not cure gallstones or completely eliminate symptoms but may help control the pain caused by gallstones. Some people find that certain foods make their symptoms worse. Try keeping a food and symptoms diary, this may help you identify problem foods.

There is often confusing messages about fat and gallstones. People sometimes believe that they need to remove all fat from their diet if they have gallstones. This is not usually necessary and following a very low fat diet can cause more gallstones to form and lead to fat soluble vitamin deficiencies. It is important to choose healthier fats and reduce saturated fats.

Some people are more sensitive to fat than others. If this is the case with you, reduce your fat intake.

Prevention of further gallstones

A healthy, well balanced diet is recommended to prevent formation of further gallstones.

Eat more fibre – choose mostly seeded wholemeal bread, oats, brown rice, wholemeal pasta and noodles. Eat potatoes with skins. Eat at least 5 portions of fruits, vegetables and salad every day.

Eat less saturated fat – choose olive oil, vegetable oil and rapeseed oil as these are better fats for health. Avoid animal fats, palm oil, coconut oil, pastry, sausages, and fatty cuts of meat, fried foods, butter, ghee, lard, cream, hard cheeses, cakes, biscuits and processed foods.

Replace meat with fish, soya mince, Quorn®, tofu, peas, lentils, chickpeas and beans.

Eat less sugar – choose sugar free drinks and replace sugary snacks and puddings with fruit, nuts or yoghurt. Avoid adding sugar to drinks and food.

Eat healthy fats to tolerance – choose nuts, seeds, avocado and oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel.

Exercise - increasing your activity levels can help maintain a healthy weight. Choose activities you enjoy, contact your doctor before you start any new exercise.

If you require support with weight loss or increasing your exercise the Healthy Lifestyles Team in Torbay offer a range of services. For further information please telephone 0300 456 1006 or see

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/healthy-lifestyles/>

More advice on exercise and losing weight can be found on www.nhs.uk and www.bda.uk.com

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.