

Eating well after gastro-intestinal surgery

Introduction

This leaflet contains general information to help you with eating after surgery. If you need more detailed advice please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

Why do you need to eat well after surgery?

- Eating well before and after surgery or illness will help you recover faster. Eating too little may affect your energy levels.
- If you have a poor appetite, or eating less than usual, then you may lose weight or be at risk of losing weight.
- Lack of protein, minerals and vitamins may make you more open to infection or delay the healing process.
- It is important that you eat a balanced diet, to provide all the necessary nutrients for recovery.

Meal pattern

- Eating small, frequent meals and snacks during the day will be easier to manage than three larger meals, especially if your appetite is poor.
- Aim for three small meals each day with two to three snacks or nourishing drinks in between.
- Meals and drinks should be high in calories and protein to meet your daily requirements.
- Drinks, snacks and meals can be fortified to make them more nutritious e.g. add cream/butter/cheese/sugar to foods

Protein Foods

Meat and Fish

- Include at least 75 to 100g (3 to 4oz) of meat, chicken or fish with your cooked meal.
- Convenience meals are a good standby to have in the fridge or freezer. Try fish in sauce, shepherd's pie or lasagne.
- For a snack meal, include smaller portions of meat or fish in a sandwich or on toast. Try a ham or corned beef sandwich or sardines on toast.

Milk and Yogurt

- Aim for one pint of milk each day and use whole milk if you are at risk of losing weight. You can fortify milk by adding skimmed milk powder to increase the calorie and protein content. Whisk four heaped tablespoons into one pint of milk.
- Have milky drinks, milky puddings, custard, full fat yogurt and milk jellies.

Cheese and Eggs

- Have a cheese or egg meal for a change, such as macaroni cheese, quiche, scrambled eggs or omelette.
- For a snack meal, have cheese or egg on toast, cheese and crackers, or cheese/egg sandwiches.
- Try making a cheese sauce to put with fish or pasta, and sprinkle grated cheese on top.

High calorie foods to help build you up

- Carbohydrate is a good source of energy, so it is important to include starchy foods at each meal (bread, potatoes, pasta, rice and breakfast cereals).
- Margarine, butter and oil are all fats and contain similar numbers of calories, so adding these to foods will increase the calorie content. Add lots of butter or margarine. Spread thickly on bread or crackers or mash into potatoes.
- Do not use light or low-fat spread if you are trying to increase your energy intake.
- Roast potatoes and chips are high in calories and can be eaten as part of your diet.
- Add double cream to soup, sauces and puddings.
- Try adding sugar to drinks, breakfast cereals or desserts.
- Add jam, honey or syrup to plain cakes and scones
- If you have a poor appetite try biscuits, cakes, sweets, chocolate or crisps as in-between meal snacks.

Fibre

After having an operation on your bowel you may be unsure if you can eat foods which are high in fibre. Foods high in fibre help with bowel function and it is important to include these foods in your diet if they are tolerated well.

Fibre is found in fruits and vegetables, wholemeal breads, brown rice and wholewheat pasta, beans and pulses and high fibre breakfast cereals (weetabix, bran flakes, shredded wheat, all bran).

One to two weeks after your operation you can start to reintroduce high fibre foods back into your diet. After surgery, tolerance of fibre may be varied. The following tips may help.

Week 1

Try replacing white bread with wholemeal bread, best of both bread or 50/50 bread.

Week 2

Try eating an extra portion of fruit and vegetables each day. Five portions of fruit and vegetables are recommended for a healthy diet.

Week 3

Try a higher fibre breakfast cereal eg Branflakes, Shredded Wheat, Weetabix or Porridge

Week 4

Try other fibrous foods like pulses, nuts or dried fruit.

Contact information

Nutrition & Dietetic Department

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PALS is a confidential service for people who would like information, help or advice about the services provided by any of our hospitals. Please call 0800 783 4372 between 9am and 5pm or e-mail pals@nwlh.nhs.uk.

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