

Diet After an Esophagectomy or Gastrectomy

Surgery of the esophagus and/or stomach changes how food passes through your body. After surgery, you may have problems such as getting full too fast; heart-burn and reflux; vomiting; diarrhea; stomach pain; bloating and gas; or dumping syndrome. Changes to what you eat and the way you eat may help you manage these problems.

A Word of Caution

Contact your doctor if:

- You have diarrhea or foul-smelling stools.
- You follow the tips in this handout and still have diarrhea, cramping, or abdominal pain.

Food Choices As You Recover from Surgery

- Your doctor may recommend a clear liquid diet for the first days after surgery. Examples of clear liquids are clear juice, ice pops (Popsicles), broth, and gelatin.
- When your doctor says it is okay to move beyond a clear liquid diet, gradually add other liquids and soft foods (such as oatmeal, pudding, custards,

milkshakes, cream soups, yogurt, and sherbet) to your eating plan. Try new liquids and foods one at a time so you can tell whether a particular type causes problems.

- Keep your portion sizes small. Many people cannot tolerate more than a few ounces of food at a time.
- Drink most beverages in between meals instead of with meals. Limit your fluids at each meal to 4 ounces.
- Slowly increase the amount you eat to six small meals per day that are low in fiber. (See the chart that starts on the next page for recommended foods and foods to possibly avoid.)
- Limit very cold or very hot foods and drinks; eat slowly; and chew foods well.
- After you have recovered from surgery, start eating small portions of solid foods. Try foods one at a time to test your tolerance of each type.
- Avoid high-fiber foods like bran and beans. These foods may be hard to tolerate.
- Limit sugary foods if you had a gastrectomy or have high blood glucose (sugar) levels.
- If diarrhea is a problem, limit sweets and eat foods that provide protein, like cottage cheese, peanut butter sandwiches, or sugar-free yogurt.

Recommended and Possibly Not Recommended Foods After an Esophagectomy or Gastrectomy

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods That May Cause Distress
Dairy foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 2 cups (16 ounces) of milk per day (use lactase-treated milk or soy milk if you are lactose intolerant) • Yogurt • Soy milk or yogurt • Mild cheese • Cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amounts of dairy products if they cause bloating or diarrhea
Meat and other protein foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tender, lean, ground, and well-cooked beef and poultry • Tofu • Well-cooked fish • Well-cooked eggs • Smooth peanut butter • Other smooth nut butters (such as soy, almond, or sunflower butter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tough meat or meat with gristle • Fried meats or fried eggs • Crunchy nut butters • Nuts and seeds • Beans
Grain foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refined grain products with less than 2 grams of fiber per serving, such as cream of wheat, oatmeal, white rice, fine-ground grits, white bread, and pasta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain or high-fiber grain foods, including bran, whole wheat flour, and popcorn • Crispy grain foods with hard edges (like snack chips)

Continues

Recommended and Possibly Not Recommended Foods After an Esophagectomy or Gastrectomy *(continued)*

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods That May Cause Distress
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned and well-cooked vegetables • Mashed potatoes • Up to ½ cup (4 ounces) of vegetable juice per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas-producing vegetables, including broccoli, onions, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts, raw vegetables, and cooked greens or spinach • Vegetables that have shells, skins, or seeds, such as corn, peas, and beans • Potato chips
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juice without pulp • Applesauce • Peeled fruit without pulp • Canned fruit in light syrup or juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried fruit • Fruit pulp or skins • Citrus fruit • Berries • Pineapple
Fats/oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small amounts of canola or olive oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-fat foods (including fried foods; foods made with lots of butter; cheese sauces; and gravy)
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broth and strained soups made with ingredients in the Recommended Foods column • Pureed or blended chicken noodle soup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caffeinated, alcoholic, or carbonated beverages • Hot drinks • Citrus or acidic beverages

Other Recovery Strategies

In addition to making the right food choices, the following tips can help you feel better and stay healthy:

- To feel more comfortable, wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Do not lie down for at least two hours after eating (gravity from being upright helps move the food through your digestive tract).
- Take vitamin/mineral supplements or medications as recommended by your doctor or registered dietitian to treat any deficiencies in vitamin B-12, vitamin D, iron, or calcium.

Managing Common Problems

Filling Up Too Quickly

After surgery, your stomach is smaller than it was before. Try these tips to prevent discomfort caused by getting full too quickly:

- Eat small amounts and limit each meal to two or three foods.
- Plan to eat six times a day (or eat every three hours). Do not wait until you feel hungry.
- Eat solid foods first.
- Do not drink liquids while eating and wait 45 minutes after eating to drink fluids.
- Place foods on a small plate so the smaller portions look appealing.

Heartburn and Reflux

To prevent or limit heartburn and reflux, try these tips:

- Do not drink fluids at the same time that you eat.
- Eat smaller amounts.
- Wait two hours after eating before lying down or going to bed.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Do not drink caffeinated beverages.
- Avoid high-fat foods; acidic foods (such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, or vinegar); spicy foods (such as pepper or chilies); and foods flavored with mint or chocolate.
- Avoid alcohol and milk-based drinks.

Vomiting

Vomiting may be caused by eating too much, eating too fast, or drinking while eating. To avoid vomiting:

- Eat slowly and completely chew food before swallowing.
- Wait 45 minutes after eating to drink liquids.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea may be caused by drinking while eating; eating foods that are not well chewed; lactose intolerance (the inability to digest lactose, the natural sugar in milk); or consuming foods and beverages that are high in sugar.

To avoid diarrhea, try these tips:

- Wait at least 30 minutes between eating and drinking.
- Lie down after eating.
- Do not eat foods or drink beverages that are high in sugar.
- Avoid milk and dairy foods, or use lactase enzyme replacements if you are lactose intolerant.
- Do not drink hot beverages.

Stomach Pain

You may have stomach pain if you do not chew foods well; if you swallow air; if you eat too fast; if you drink and eat at the same time; or if you consume very hot or very cold foods and beverages. To reduce your risk of stomach pain, try these tips:

- Completely chew each bite of food.
- Do not drink while eating and do not gulp when drinking.
- Do not eat sugary foods.
- Serve foods and beverages at room temperature.

Bloating and Gas

Common causes of bloating and gas include swallowing too much air and eating gassy foods. To avoid bloating and gas, try these tips:

- Do not use straws, chew gum, or suck on ice or candy.
- Do not talk while eating.
- Do not drink sodas or carbonated beverages.
- Avoid gassy foods.

Managing Dumping Syndrome

Dumping syndrome is abdominal cramps and nausea that occur within one to three hours after eating. Other symptoms of dumping syndrome can include diarrhea, dizziness, rapid heart rate, sweating, fatigue, or low blood glucose (sugar) levels.

To avoid dumping syndrome, try eating more slowly and avoiding foods and beverages that are high in sugar. The following chart suggests other ways to manage symptoms of dumping syndrome.

Managing Symptoms of Dumping Syndrome

Symptom	Management Tips
Nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat slowly and limit portions to small amounts. • Choose cool foods with little odor.
Feeling too full	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat slowly. • Eat smaller amounts.
Stomach cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink ½ to 1 cup (4 to 8 ounces) of a sugar-free noncarbonated beverage before eating. • Completely chew food before swallowing. • Use pancreatic enzymes if recommended by your doctor. • Try a lactose-restricted diet. • Try a low-fat diet.
Diarrhea right after eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink ½ to 1 cup (4 to 8 ounces) of a sugar-free noncarbonated beverage before eating.
