Eating After Your Gastric Bypass Surgery or Whipple Procedure

This information describes the dietary (eating and drinking) guidelines you will need to follow after your gastric bypass (gastrojejunostomy) or Whipple procedure (pancreaticoduodenectomy). It also describes how to monitor your bowel movements for changes after your surgery.

Your clinical dietitian nutritionist will review this information with you before you leave the hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, or are losing weight after you leave the hospital, call 212-639-7071 to set up an appointment with your clinical dietitian nutritionist.

Dietary Guidelines

After your surgery, the amount of food you can eat at once and the time it takes for food to leave your stomach may change. Because of this, you may need to change the way you eat.

Follow the guidelines below. You can also use the sample menus at the end of this resource to plan your meals.

Eat smaller meals more often

After surgery, you may feel full more quickly when you eat.

If this happens to you, or if you have nausea or indigestion, try eating smaller meals more often. For example, try eating 6 half-size meals instead of 3 main meals each day. This will allow you to eat the same amount of food overall, but in smaller portions that will be easier to digest.
You may be able to eat larger portions as time passes.

**Drink enough liquids**

Try to drink around 8 (8-ounce) glasses of liquids each day. This will help you keep from getting dehydrated.

Drink most of your liquids between meals, at least 1 hour before or after you eat. Drink only 4 ounces (½ cup) of liquids with each meal. This will help you have more space in your stomach for food.

**Chew your food well**

Chew your food well to help your body digest your meals more quickly and easily.

**Avoid foods that cause gas**

If you’re having bloating or fullness, it may help to avoid foods and drinks that can cause gas. Examples include:

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Brussels sprouts
- Cauliflower
- Fruits that aren’t ripe
- Carbonated drinks, such as sodas or seltzer water

Try avoiding these things for the first month after your surgery. If you’re not having symptoms after that time, you can try adding them back to your diet one at a time to see if you can tolerate them.

**Eat slowly**

Eat slowly to avoid feeling uncomfortable due to overeating. You will know when you’re full.

**Include protein in your diet**
After surgery, your body needs more protein to help you heal. Good protein sources include:

- Lean beef cuts
  - Eye round roast
  - Top round roast
  - Bottom round roasts
  - Steaks
  - Top sirloin steak
- Chicken or turkey with the skin removed
- Fish
- Low-fat dairy products
- Eggs

**Start with low-fat foods**

Eat low-fat foods right after your surgery. You eat less fat by following the guidelines below.

- Trim any visible fat from meats.
- Bake or broil foods instead of frying them.
- Use only a pat of butter or margarine on toast.
- Avoid heavy gravies and cream sauces.
- Limit “regular” (not labelled low-fat) snack chips, croissants, doughnuts, and rich desserts like pound cake or cakes with frostings
- Stay away from processed meats like hot dogs, sausage, bacon, and bologna, unless they’re labelled “low-fat”.

You can gradually increase the amount of fat in your diet to an amount that you can tolerate. See the section below called “Monitor Your Bowel Movements for Changes” for more information.
Monitor Your Bowel Movements for Changes

Problems with fat absorption
Some people have problems absorbing fat after their surgery. This may cause weight loss or make it harder for your body to absorb some vitamins.

You may not be absorbing all the fats you’re eating if you’re having any of the following symptoms:

- Frequent bowel movements
- Bowel movements that float
- Bowel movements that are very light in color, frothy, greasy, or foul smelling

If you have any of these symptoms, ask your doctor if you need to take pancreatic enzyme medication. An example is pancrelipase (Zenpep®). You can take these medications with your meals to help with digestion.

Lactose intolerance
Lactose intolerance is not being able to digest lactose. Lactose is a sugar found in dairy products. Some people become lactose intolerant after surgery. If you have gas, bloating, or diarrhea after you eat foods with lactose, you may have lactose intolerance.

Milk, ice cream, and soft cheeses (such as cottage cheese) have a lot of lactose. Hard cheeses like cheddar and Parmesan have lower amounts of lactose. Some people with mild lactose intolerance can tolerate these lower lactose foods.

There are also medications available that can help you digest lactose. One example is lactase (Lactaid®)

Sometimes, lactose intolerance after surgery will go away. You can try having dairy again in a few months to see if it has improved.

Dumping syndrome
Dumping syndrome is when you have diarrhea (loose bowel movements) after
having large amounts of sweets, such as:

- Sugar, honey, and syrup
- Regular (not diet) soda and fruit juices
- Cakes, cookies, and candies

If you think you have dumping syndrome, limit or avoid sugary foods or drinks and try diluting juices with water.

If you have dumping syndrome, it’s especially important to take steps to keep from getting dehydrated.

- Limit your intake of liquids to only 4 ounces during meals.
- Drink more liquids between meals, at least 1 hour before or after a meal.

**Sample Menus**

The sample menus at the end of this resource have 6 small meals with 4 ounces of liquid at each meal and 8 ounces of liquid between meals. Soup also counts as a liquid.

The menus include solid foods. If you’re on a mechanical soft (diced food) diet when you go home, ask your doctor when you can start eating solid foods again. For more information, read the resource *Eating Guide for Puréed and Mechanical Soft Diets* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/pureed_mechanical_soft_diets](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/pureed_mechanical_soft_diets)).

Many of the foods on the menus aren’t sugar-free. Use sugar-free or “light” yogurt in place of regular yogurt, limit fruit juices, and dilute fruit juices with water if you:

- Have diabetes
- Have high blood sugar
- Are having dumping syndrome

Foods with an asterisk (*) have lactose. If you’re lactose-intolerant, try lactose-free milk (such as Lactaid) in place of regular milk. You can also take lactase
tablets or drops to help you digest dairy products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meal Time</th>
<th>Sample Menu 1</th>
<th>Sample Menu 2</th>
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| **Breakfast** 7:30 AM | *3/4 cup of corn flakes*  
*1/2 cup of milk*  
*1/2 of a banana* | *1 scrambled egg*  
*1 slice of toast*  
*1 teaspoon of margarine*  
*1/2 cup of orange juice* |
| 9:00 AM           | *1/2 cup juice mixed with 1/2 cup water*                                     | *1 cup of tomato juice*                                                        |
| **Snack** 10:00 AM | *1/2 cup of cottage cheese*  
*1/2 cup of canned fruit* | *1 tablespoon of peanut butter*  
*3 graham crackers*  
*1/2 cup of milk* |
| 11:30 AM          | *1 cup of whole milk*                                                       | *1/2 cup juice mixed with 1/2 cup water*                                       |
| **Lunch** 12:30 PM | *1/2 cup of chicken soup*  
*1/2 of a turkey and cheese sandwich with lettuce and tomato*  
*2 teaspoons of mayonnaise* | *1/2 of a roast beef sandwich with lettuce and tomato*  
*2 teaspoons of mayonnaise*  
*1/2 cup of milk* |
| 2:00 PM           | *1 cup of tomato juice*                                                     | *1 cup of broth*                                                              |
| **Snack** 3:00 PM  | *Fruit yogurt*  
*1/2 cup of cranberry juice* | *1/2 cup of tuna salad*  
*6 saltine crackers*  
*1/2 cup of pineapple juice* |
| 4:30 PM           | *1/2 cup juice mixed with 1/2 cup water*                                     | *1/2 cup juice mixed with 1/2 cup water*                                       |
| **Dinner** 5:30 PM | *2 ounces of baked chicken*  
*1 small baked potato with sour cream*  
*1/2 cup of cooked carrots*  
*1/2 cup of lemonade* | *2 ounces of baked fish*  
*1/2 cup of rice*  
*1/2 cup of green beans*  
*2 teaspoons of margarine*  
*1/2 cup of apple juice* |
| 7:00 PM           | *1 cup of water*                                                            | *1 cup of water*                                                              |
| **Snack** 8:00 PM  | *1 ounce of cheddar cheese*  
*6 saltine crackers*  
*1/2 cup of apple juice* | *1/4 cup of cottage cheese*  
*1 slice of bread*  
*1/2 cup of cranberry juice* |
| 9:30 PM | • ½ cup juice mixed with ½ cup water | • ½ cup juice mixed with ½ cup water |

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.