Dietary advice for patients with gallstones

What are gallstones?
Gallstones are small stones that can sometimes form in the gallbladder. Most gallstones are composed of cholesterol. Cholesterol precipitates into stones when the gall bladder empties less often or bile becomes supersaturated with cholesterol. Gallstones are more common as you get older. Obesity and pregnancy also increase the risk of developing gallstones.

How should I change my diet?
- If you find any particular foods trigger your symptoms, you could trial avoiding them to see if this helps.
- Try to eat regular meals as fasting reduces gall bladder emptying which increases the risk of stones forming.
- Eat breakfast soon after you wake up as cholesterol concentrations are highest in bile produced overnight.
- Some people find that following a low fat diet can prevent episodes of pain from gallstones, or make them less frequent. However, this is not necessarily the case for everyone.
- If you are overweight, gradual weight loss can reduce the risk of developing gallstones. However, rapid weight loss (greater than 2 lbs or 1kg per week) may increase the chance of gallstone formation.
- A low fat diet may be beneficial if you suffer with steatorrhoea (pale, yellow, orange or oily stools which may float or be foul smelling).
- Your diet should not be completely fat free, a small amount of fat is needed by the body. You should try to choose low fat foods, but still eat a varied and healthy diet.
- 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.
- Eating a healthy balanced diet, as outlined below, is beneficial for your general health. However, if you have lost a lot of weight or are underweight, following a low fat diet may make this worse. Please ask to speak to a Dietitian if this is the case.

Tips for eating less fat
- Try buying low fat versions of foods e.g. foods labelled as ‘low fat’, ‘light’ or ‘diet’.
- Check food labels and choose foods that contain less than 3g of total fat per 100g of food.
• When cooking with oil try measuring out the oil you are using, instead of pouring directly from the bottle to the pan. You should use no more than one teaspoon of oil per person. If you use a non-stick frying pan you may find you do not need any oil at all, especially if you add moisture from other ingredients such as tinned tomatoes.
• Try micro-waving, steaming, poaching, boiling or grilling instead of roasting and frying.
• Take the skin off poultry and remove visible fat from the meat before you start cooking.
• Food bought from takeaways or restaurants are generally higher in fat, therefore eating healthily will be more difficult if you choose to eat out.

### Which foods should I eat?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Low fat (good choices)</th>
<th>Higher fat (should be avoided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fats</strong></td>
<td>Use small amounts of low fat spreads or use spray cooking oil.</td>
<td>Butter, margarine, lard, suet, olive oil, vegetable oil, sunflower oil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dairy products and eggs</strong></td>
<td>Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk. Low fat Yogurt or fromage frais. Reduced fat cheeses such as; cottage cheese, low fat soft cheese, edam, half fat hard cheese. Boiled eggs, poached eggs, scrambled eggs (no butter).</td>
<td>Whole milk, evaporated or condensed milk. Cream, full fat yogurt, ice cream, full fat cheese. Fried eggs, Scrambled eggs with butter.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fish</strong></td>
<td>White fish e.g. haddock, sole, plaice, cod, whiting, prawns, tuna in brine/springwater.</td>
<td>Oily fish e.g. sardines, mackerel, kippers, tuna in oil.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meat</strong></td>
<td>Lean meats and poultry.</td>
<td>Fried or processed meats. Fat on meat, burgers, sausages, salami, meat paste or pâté, meat pies or tinned meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pulses</strong></td>
<td>Beans, peas, lentils.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Starchy foods</strong></td>
<td>Bread, rice, pasta, cereals, potatoes.</td>
<td>Pastry, chips, roast potatoes, pasta in creamy/cheese sauces.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit</strong></td>
<td>Most varieties of fresh, frozen or tinned fruit.</td>
<td>Avocado, olives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vegetables</strong></td>
<td>All vegetables and salads.</td>
<td>Roasted or fried vegetables, salads with dressings</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sauces</strong></td>
<td>Ketchup, light mayonnaise, pickle, marmite, low fat or light salad dressings, salsa, tomato based sauces, white sauces made with cornflour and low fat milk, gravy made with stock cube and cornflour</td>
<td>Salad cream, mayonnaise, salad dressings, white sauce, cheese sauce, creamy sauces, gravy made with fat or meat juices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drinks</strong></td>
<td>Squash, juices, semi skimmed or skimmed milk, instant hot chocolate or horlicks made with water or skimmed milk.</td>
<td>Hot chocolate, horlicks, milk shakes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Snacks</strong></td>
<td>Jelly sweets, ice lollies, mints, marshmallows, Turkish delight.</td>
<td>Chocolate, toffee, fudge, crisps, nuts, seeds, Bombay mix.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Puddings**  |  Jelly, tinned fruit, meringue, sorbet, low fat milk puddings.  |  Cakes, biscuits, milk puddings (unless skimmed milk), shop bought desserts, custard.

**Miscellaneous**  |  Sugar, honey, jam, golden syrup, marmalade, low fat houmous  |  Lemon curd, peanut butter, houmous.

### What are the benefits of following this diet?
Some people find that following a low fat diet can prevent episodes of pain from gallstones, or make them less frequent. This leaflet outlines healthy eating principles, which should allow you to follow a healthy, balanced and nutritionally adequate diet. Eating healthily is also beneficial for your overall health.

### What are the risks of following this diet?
There is a risk you may lose weight. If you are underweight or concerned about weight loss please contact the dietitians on the number below.

### What are the alternatives to this diet?
You could choose not to make any changes to your diet. If you choose to eat high fat foods you may experience symptoms related to your gallstones such as pain.

### Contacts
Your dietitian is: ____________________________
Telephone number: 01223 216655

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For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

### Other formats:
If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department which has authored the leaflet.

### Document history
**Authors**  |  Nutrition & Dietetics  
**Pharmacist**  |  n/a  
**Department**  |  Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ  [www.cuh.org.uk](http://www.cuh.org.uk)
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