

Nutrition after oesophagectomy

What is an oesophagectomy?

An oesophagectomy is an operation that removes all or part of the oesophagus (food pipe) and replaces it with another organ - usually the stomach. As a result, there is less room for food to be held. Therefore you may feel full more quickly, and food can pass into your small bowel sooner after eating. You should still be able to enjoy all the foods you ate before your operation. However, you may have to make some changes to your eating habits.

Eating again

A feeding tube is often placed during your surgery as you initially be nil by mouth. The feeding tube will provide you with nutrition until you are able to start eating and drinking. Depending on your progress after surgery, you may require ongoing tube feeding when you leave hospital (your dietitian and doctor will discuss this with you).

After surgery, your diet will be progressed back to normal over time starting with free fluids. Depending on your progress, your surgeon will recommend you go home

from hospital on a puree or soft diet. You may tolerate soft foods better for a period of time. However, you should be able to progress back to a normal textured diet as tolerated. This is usually 2-3 weeks after surgery. Your dietitian or doctor will be able to discuss this with you.

Common problems and management

The surgery can cause problems as described below. Not everyone will get these symptoms.

1. Feeling full early

- Eat small meals every few hours, aiming for a total of six or more meals each day.
- Eat nutritious snacks between meals.
- Have drinks at least 30 minutes before or after meals, not with meals as this may fill you up too quickly.

2. Reflux and difficulty swallowing

- Reflux is common post-surgery – ensure that you have discussed medications to manage this with your doctor.
- Strategies to manage reflux include having small frequent meals, sitting

upright when eating and remaining upright for at least 30 minutes post meals.

- Adjusting to swallowing can take some time post-surgery. Consuming soft foods and having small sips of water with meals may help.

3. Weight loss

- Eat nutritious snacks between meals e.g. cheese and crackers, sandwiches, nuts, dried fruit, yoghurt or dairy desserts.
- Include foods that contain fat and protein at each meal e.g. eggs, meat, chicken, fish, tofu, baked beans, cheese, milk, olive oil, avocado or nuts (including peanut butter).
- Choose nourishing drinks – select milkshakes, *Milo*, *Sustagen* or *Ensure* rather than tea and coffee.

4. “Dumping syndrome”

Normally there is a muscle at the bottom of the stomach that controls the amount of food the stomach lets into the small bowel. This muscle can be affected and not work as well after surgery, causing food to move too quickly from the stomach into the small bowel.

The following symptoms may occur after surgery including:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Bloating, cramping or diarrhoea
- Palpitations, sweating or shakiness
- Fullness
- Lack of concentration or tiredness

These symptoms are referred to as “dumping syndrome”. Most people experience symptoms 10 to 30 minutes after eating (early dumping syndrome); others have symptoms one to four hours after eating (late dumping syndrome).

To help prevent these symptoms:

- Avoid large meals – choose six to eight small meals or snacks each day.
- Have drinks 30 minutes before or after meals, instead of with meals.
- Avoid food and drink that contains a lot of sugar e.g. regular cordial, soft drink, lollies and mixed alcoholic beverages.
- Avoid large amounts of caffeine (cola drinks, energy drinks, coffee and tea).
- Include high fibre foods if you have late dumping symptoms or trial a fibre supplement e.g. *Metamucil* or *Benefiber*. High fibre foods include lentils, baked beans, oat bran, wholegrain breads and cereals, and skins on fruit and vegetables.

- Lying down after eating may help if you experience severe symptoms.
- Taking a starchy snack (e.g. slice of bread, banana, oatmeal biscuit) may help symptoms.

Making the most of what you eat

If you can't manage a lot of food throughout the day, it is important to make the most of what you do eat. Suggestions include:

Dairy

- Add cream or cheese to main meals such as scrambled eggs, omelettes and casseroles.
- Add skim milk powder to your milk drinks.
- Choose dairy snacks like custard, yoghurt, ice cream, rice puddings and mousse.

Meat and meat alternatives

- Add meat, lentils or other legumes to dishes such as soups and casseroles.
- Eggs make a nutritious addition to meals or an easy snack.

Breads and cereals

- Choose nutritious sandwich fillings e.g. sliced meat, canned fish, baked beans, cheese, avocado, tinned spaghetti or eggs.

Fruit and vegetables

- Add margarine, butter, oil or cheese to vegetables e.g. cauliflower cheese or a creamy potato bake.
- Add ice cream, yoghurt or custard to fruit.
- Try to eat a variety of types and colours to ensure you are getting a good variety of nutrients.
- Include fruit/vegetable juice if you have difficulty eating enough fruit and vegetables.

Easy snacks

- Supermarket freezers can provide ready-made meals and snacks that require little preparation.
- Dairy foods like custard, yoghurt, rice pudding, milk desserts and milk drinks make easy snacks. Choose full cream options where possible.
- Muesli bars, pre-packaged crackers and dips/cheese and drinks such as *Up & Go* make handy snacks.

Future nutrition goals

If over time you are able to tolerate a more normal diet and your weight is stable, aim to progress back to the general healthy eating guidelines with regular exercise to aid healthy weight maintenance.

General rules for eating after oesophagectomy

- ✓ Eat a healthy diet choosing a wide variety of foods
- ✓ Eat slowly and chew foods well
- ✓ Avoid very sugary food and drink (such as soft drink, cordial, lollies) and monitor caffeine which may contribute to dumping syndrome.
- ✓ Have most of your fluids at different times to your meals. Small sips of fluid

with meals may help with discomfort on swallowing.

- ✓ Include foods that contain fat and protein at each meal
- ✓ Aim for six to eight smaller meals/snacks throughout the day
- ✓ Your doctor is the best person to advise you regarding your alcohol intake.

Sample meal plan for the first few weeks

Approximate time	Food or drink
7am - On waking	Glass of fruit juice (unsweetened)
9am - Breakfast	<i>Weetbix</i> softened with full cream milk + added cream and honey
10am - Early morning	Glass of <i>Sustagen/Ensure</i> made on milk
11am - Mid-morning snack	Mashed banana + peanut butter on bread
12pm - Lunch	Sandwich with boiled egg and grated cheese and margarine/butter/avocado/mayonnaise
2pm - Early afternoon	Glass of <i>Sustagen/Ensure</i> made on milk
3pm - Mid-afternoon snack	Tub of yoghurt / rice pudding / crème caramel / sponge and custard
5pm - Late afternoon	Water / tea / coffee / milk
6pm - Dinner	Shepherd's pie - diced zucchini, carrot, pumpkin in mince with mashed potato and cheese topping
7pm - Supper	Water / tea / coffee / milk
8pm - Before bed snack	Tinned fruit and ice cream