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What can I eat after my bowel surgery?

Colorectal Surgical Unit
Western General Hospital



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Introduction

The information in this booklet will help you once you are ready to eat after your surgery. After bowel surgery it is important to get your bowel working again to promote normal bowel function to aid your recovery.

When a part of your bowel has been removed it is not unusual to experience a change in your normal bowel habit. This is because the bowel helps the body absorb nutrients and fluids from the foods we eat and drink. After taking out everything the body needs, the bowel expels leftover waste. Removing part of the bowel means that there is less travel time and a smaller area in which this process occurs and the resulting stools are passed with more liquid. It is important to be aware that it may take several months for your bowel movements to settle back to normal however these changes usually settle with time.

It is also not unusual to experience a reduced appetite for the first few days after surgery. During this time it is important to drink plenty of fluids. When you start to eat, it is important to eat 'little and often' to promote a regular food and fluid intake. You may also be offered Oral Nutritional Supplement drinks (ONS drinks) to bridge the gap.

Diet

After surgery, the aim is to work towards eating a balanced regular diet at home. At first you may find that certain foods or food groups do not agree with you and you develop diarrhoea as a result. Try to introduce these foods into your diet a little at a time. If they cause severe reactions you may wish to avoid them for a short time.

Remember: everyone is different and certain foods may need to be introduced more slowly than others.

Notes:

Interpretation and translation:

For a copy of this leaflet in larger print, Braille or your community language, please telephone: the ERAS Team on 0131 537 3412.

Useful Resources:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home>

<http://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/information-resources/your-diet-living-with-and-beyond-bowel-cancer/>

<https://www.beatingbowelcancer.org/patient-booklets-factsheets-0>

<https://www.ERASsociety.org>

Constipation

Ensure you are drinking plenty of fluids. Aim for 8-10 cups a day.

Foods high in fibre will make stools softer and easier to pass at the same time as stimulating bowel action. Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables in your diet. These can be fresh, canned or stewed.

Try freshly squeezed fruit and vegetables juice. Add plenty of vegetables to soups/casseroles and stews and have extra toppings of vegetables on pizza.

If you have puddings, add fruit to them, e.g. fruit tarts, milk pudding with fruit added.

Use high fibre foods such as wholemeal / granary bread and wholegrain cereals, e.g. All-Bran, bran flakes, porridge and Weetabix.

Try taking some gentle exercise, such as walking or swimming.

Remember

Do not put up with difficult bowel function without asking for additional advice from your specialist nurse or GP. It may be necessary to take prescribed medicines.

What if I have a Stoma?

If you have a stoma, your stoma nurse will give you literature that contains detailed information and tips on diet and your stoma

Following surgery

Your medical team will advise when you can start to eat after your surgery, and what types of foods you can eat. This can be as early as the evening of your operation, if appropriate.

The Colorectal unit at the WGH has two menu options, the normal menu (blue) and a low fibre/fibrous menu (pink). Please ask your medical/nursing staff which menu is the best one for you.

Remember, everyone recovers from their operation differently. Your surgeon and nurse will review your diet daily and give you the appropriate advice each day.

Snacks:

The ward has a selection of snacks available, which will help you eat 'little and often' in the first couple of days after surgery. These include biscuits, cakes, yoghurt, crackers and cheese, custard/ rice pots, milk.

These are stored either in the ward fridge, kitchen cupboard or in the Nutritional Support Fridges in the wards (in the corridor near the entrance to the wards). You are encouraged to help yourself to these snacks. Your family can also bring in snacks for you. Each ward may have a different range of snacks, so all of these may not be available at the same time. If you are unsure, please ask your nurse what snacks are available for you and let the nurses know if you have eaten or drunk anything from the fridge so that they can update your chart (or update your



enhanced recovery diary if you have been given one). You can also find supplement drinks in these fridges. If you can't manage to eat, these can be taken once or twice a day to give you the nutrition you need to recover after your operation.

Supplement drinks

You should try to have some supplement drinks in the first few days after your surgery. This will help improve your nutritional intake while you are starting to eat again. The drinks are in the Nutritional support fridges. Please feel free to walk to these fridges and take a drink or ask ward staff for these. Aim to have a drink between meals and not too close to a meal so you do not fill yourself up



Discharge advice:

Following discharge from hospital, your appetite may still be reduced so you should continue eating small portions often throughout the day and drink plenty fluids.

If you continue to have a poor appetite or seem to be losing weight, please make an appointment with your GP to discuss this.

Other general tips for diet after bowel surgery includes:

- Reintroduce a variety of foods back into your diet. You may find foods affect you differently after surgery. Introducing food gradually in small portions can help you to identify any foods that cause you difficulties with your bowels.
- Eat foods high in calories and protein to help with healing and avoiding infection, e.g. meat, fish, cheese and milk
- Eat small, more frequent meals to begin with rather than 3 large meals a day. Try to avoid long gaps between meals

- Reduce the amount of caffeine you have in a day. Caffeine can stimulate the bowel and make diarrhoea worse
- Take small mouthfuls and chew your food slowly
- Drinking peppermint water may help relieve trapped wind and so ease discomfort.

Diarrhoea

Increase your fluid intake to prevent yourself becoming dehydrated. Aim for 8-10 cups per day. You may wish to include fluids such as isotonic drinks, e.g. Lucozade sport, Gatorade.

Foods that may help thicken your stools include white bread, white pasta, boiled white rice, potatoes, cheese, yoghurt, smooth peanut butter, noodles, ripe bananas and marshmallows.

You may wish to reduce high fibre foods for a short time, e.g. wholemeal bread/ wholegrain breakfast cereals.

Avoid:

- Greasy, fried or fatty foods, as these can make your bowels loose
- Spicy foods
- Tea/coffee, which can stimulate your gut.

Remember to eat little and often.