

Common Questions After Bariatric Surgery

After surgery, you may have questions about what to eat or drink, or you may be having some problems. This handout has answers to some common questions after bariatric surgery. If you have other questions, or are still having problems after making changes, talk to your dietitian and health care team.

How much fluid do I need?

Most people need to drink about 9–12 cups (2250–3000 mL) of fluid each day. You need more fluids if you're active or the weather is warm.

After surgery, you still need the same amount of fluid, but it's harder to meet your needs. You can't drink a large amount of fluid at once because your stomach is much smaller now. If you don't drink enough fluid you can become dehydrated or constipated.

Signs of dehydration:

- feeling thirsty
- dry skin
- urinating (peeing) less often
- feeling tired
- dark urine
- feeling light-headed (dizzy)

Tips to prevent dehydration:

- Choose water and calorie-free fluids (non-carbonated) more often each day.
- Sip small amounts of fluid throughout the day between meals.

What if I bring up food or throw up after I eat?

Bringing up food

You might bring up a bit of food you just swallowed if you didn't chew that food well enough. This can happen without feeling like you want to throw up, but you may have a sour taste in your mouth, or heartburn.

Throwing up (vomiting)

You may vomit if you:

- eat too fast
- don't chew your food enough
- eat too much
- drink fluids with solid foods

Vomiting after surgery can also happen because your small stomach opening is blocked. This can happen if you don't chew your food well or eat a food that is not recommended. Changing your food choices and eating habits should prevent or stop vomiting.

- If you bring up some food or vomit, give yourself some time to feel better, then try to drink some fluids.
- If fluids are ok, then try solid foods again at your next meal or snack.

Sometimes, vomiting after surgery may be due to a surgical problem. If you have made changes but you still bring food up or vomit, see your doctor or dietitian.

See your doctor or go to the emergency department right away if you:

- can't eat or drink
- are dehydrated
- have pain or bleeding
- have trouble swallowing

What if I'm constipated?

Constipation is when your stool is hard, difficult or painful to pass, or when you have less than 3 bowel movements a week. Constipation is usually caused by:

- not enough fluid
- ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement
- not being active
- not enough fibre
- stress
- certain medicines and supplements

If you become constipated, try these tips:

- Drink enough fluid. Read the fluid section above.
- Be more active every day.
- Eat more fibre. Ask your dietitian about foods higher in fibre and fibre supplements.
- Talk to your health care team if you have not had a bowel movement for 3 days.

What if I have diarrhea?

Diarrhea is when you have loose, watery stools usually more than 3 times a day. Diarrhea can be caused by:

- infections
- food intolerances, like lactose intolerance
- reactions to medicines
- your surgery
- intestinal diseases, like irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, or Crohn's disease

Diarrhea is usually not harmful, but it can become a serious problem. See your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- signs of dehydration (see *How much fluid do I need?* on page 1)
- diarrhea for more than 3 days
- bad pain in your stomach or rectum
- fever of 39° C (102° F) or higher
- blood in your stools or black stools

Dumping syndrome

Dumping syndrome is a group of symptoms that some people have after bariatric surgery. Diarrhea is one of those symptoms.

Other symptoms of dumping syndrome can include nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, weakness, dizziness, flushing, sweating, anxiety, or a faster heart rate.

These symptoms happen after eating foods and drinks that are higher in sugar.

Ask your dietitian for more information about dumping syndrome.

What if I have a lot of gas?

Try these tips to decrease gas:

- Choose drinks with no bubbles (non-carbonated).
- Don't use straws while drinking.
- Don't talk while eating.
- Don't chew gum or suck on hard candy.
- Go for a walk to help the gas move out.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.

What if I am having problems and I'm not sure why?

Answering the questions below might help you solve a problem.

- Did you follow the guidelines from your surgeon or dietitian about starting solid foods? For example, did you wait to start solid foods until at least 14 days after your surgery?
 Yes No
- Did you wait 30 minutes after you finished eating before drinking fluids again?
 Yes No
- Did you stop eating before you were too full?
 Yes No
- Did you take your time to eat (at least 15–30 minutes)?
 Yes No
- Did you chew your food well?
 Yes No
- Are you mostly choosing foods that are lower in sugar and fat?
 Yes No
- Are you choosing foods that are *not* tough, chewy, stringy, sticky, or gummy?
 Yes No

If you answered *No* to any of the questions above, and you would like more information, talk to your dietitian.

Have you made changes and answered *Yes* to all the questions above, but are still having problems? If so, talk to your dietitian and health care team.

Do you have more questions?

Making changes to what, how, and how much you eat can be hard and takes time.

If you have more questions, talk to your dietitian and health care team. They are there to help you.