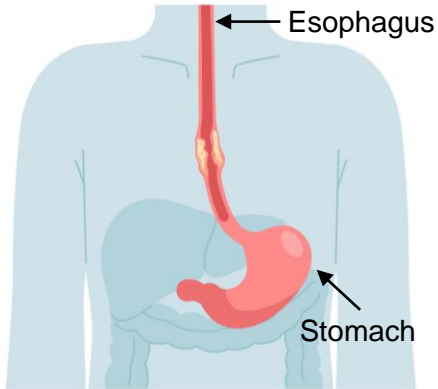


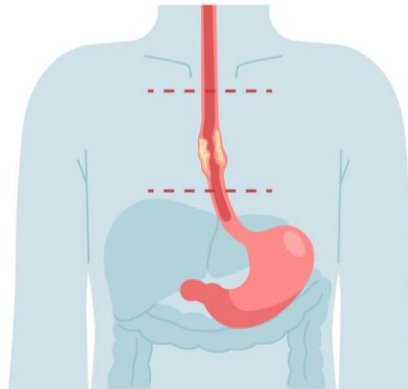
# Eating Well After an Esophagectomy

## What is an esophagectomy?



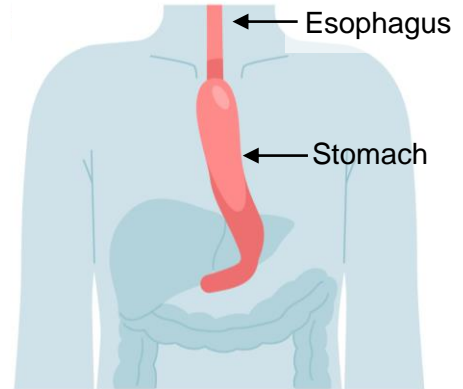
### Before surgery

Esophagus and stomach are intact.



### During surgery

Part of the esophagus, and possibly part of the stomach is removed.



### After surgery

The remaining part of the esophagus and stomach are connected.

The stomach is now smaller and is higher in your chest. It also holds less food because of its new size and shape.

## After your surgery

Because of the changes to your body, you may notice that you:

- can only eat small amounts of food at a time
- feel full quickly, feel bloated, or have acid reflux (indigestion)
- have trouble maintaining weight or gaining it back if you have lost weight

Food and drinks may leave your stomach faster or more slowly. This may cause pain or discomfort.

This handout includes information to help you manage side effects after surgery.

## Importance of nutrition

Getting enough nutrition daily helps to:

- heal, recover, and fight infection
- maintain muscle strength
- prevent muscle loss

If you have questions or are having a hard time eating after surgery, a dietitian can help.

Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](http://ahs.ca/811).

## Food textures

Changing the texture of foods eaten after surgery may help you to safely get enough nutrition.

Texture changes are only for a short time. You can gradually return to the foods you used to eat as your body heals.

Everybody is different. Gradually include foods with more texture as you feel comfortable.

### Start with liquids

After surgery liquids with no lumps will be an easier and safer way to eat. Start with liquids and after a few days or a week, add soft, moist, and easy to chew foods.

Have 5–6 liquid meals daily to get enough nutrition. Check out page 6 for smoothie recipes.

### Add soft, moist, and easy to chew foods

When you feel ready, gradually add soft, moist, and easy to chew foods to meals and snacks.

Foods that are moist are easier to swallow than foods that are dry. Add foods gradually so you can see how your body responds to them.

Gradually eat larger amounts of regular texture food. When you can eat more at a meal, you can space your meals out to 3 meals and snacks daily if you prefer.

Over time, your stomach will stretch, and you will be able to eat more.

See page 4 for meal and snack ideas.

Check out [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) for information on making foods with different textures, including:

- balanced fluids
- soft, moist, and liquid food ideas
- easy to chew foods

This information includes foods that are better tolerated with these textures.

## Get enough nutrition

Because of the smaller amount your stomach will hold, make each bite and sip count after surgery.

### Eat protein foods

Protein foods can help you heal and recover.

To get enough, include protein foods at every meal and snack.

Foods with protein include:

- beef, pork, poultry, and wild game
- eggs
- fish, shellfish, and seafood
- lentils, beans, and peas
- milk, cheese, and Greek or Icelandic yogurt
- protein powders and nutrition supplement drinks (see details in section below)
- soy foods, like tofu and fortified soy beverage

Check out [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) for high protein meal and snack ideas.

### Nutrition supplement drinks and protein powders

If you have a poor appetite or are losing weight, a nutrition supplement drink may help. They can give you extra calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

- Choose a nutrition supplement drink that is high in protein.
- Some nutrition supplement drinks can be higher in sugar. If you have dumping syndrome, choose nutrition supplement drinks with less sugar, like Glucerna® or Boost® Carb Smart.
- There are protein powders that are unflavoured. You can blend unflavoured protein powder into smoothies, or add it to mashed potatoes, soups, oatmeal, or casseroles.
- Store-brand nutrition supplement drinks and protein powders usually have as much nutrition as other brands but may cost less.

## Vitamin and minerals

After your surgery, your body may not be able to absorb some nutrients from food as well as you did before.

- Take a daily multivitamin pill with minerals. You may need to take chewable tablets or liquid vitamins and mineral supplements.
- Your blood levels of certain nutrients may be low. These include calcium, folate, iron, vitamins A, B<sub>12</sub>, D, E, and K.

Your doctor or healthcare team can order blood tests every 3 months to check if you need extra vitamins and minerals. Ask if you need to take other vitamin or mineral supplements.

## Managing side effects

Everyone is different. If a food doesn't bother you, you don't need to avoid it.

### Feeling full quickly

After eating, you may feel full quickly, have stomach pain, have nausea, or vomit. This may be because there is too much food in your stomach.

- Eat every 2–3 hours to allow for digestion.
- Eat 4–6 small meals each day. Smaller meals will help your stomach be less full.
- Eat foods high in protein first at meals and snacks. Protein helps you heal.
- Try to eat in a relaxed setting during meals.
- Eat slowly: Take small bites and chew your food well.
- If eating solid foods, space drinks away from meals.
  - Drink liquids 30 minutes before or after you eat solid food.
  - If you need to drink liquids with your meals, take only small sips.

If your feeling of fullness gets worse over the day, try eating pureed foods or balanced fluids later in the day. These foods digest quicker than solid foods.

## Gas and bloating

Bloating is from a buildup of gas in your body usually after eating or drinking.

Some people notice that certain foods, fluids, or actions cause gas and bloating. While gas and bloating are normal, they may cause you pain and discomfort.

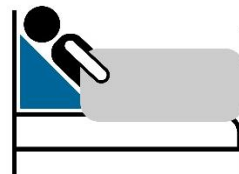
To manage bloating, limit or avoid:

- beans (canned or dry)
- beer
- broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, onion
- chewing gum
- fizzy drinks such as pop or sparkling water
- gulping fluids or drinking fast
- using drinking straws
- sucking on candy or ice cubes

## Reflux or heartburn

Reflux (heartburn) is when you have food or stomach acid coming back up into your throat from your stomach after eating.

- Try to eat 4–6 small meals every day.
- Sit upright when eating and wait 2–3 hours after eating before lying down.
- When sleeping or resting, keep your head higher than your stomach. Lying flat can make reflux worse.
  - Prop your upper body up with pillows to keep your head higher.
  - Raise the head of your bed 15–20 cm (6–8 in) by using foam wedges.



- Different foods make reflux worse for some people. If these foods bother you, limit or avoid them.
  - alcohol
  - caffeine
  - citrus fruits and juices (oranges, grapefruit)
  - high fat foods
  - foods that give you gas
  - spicy food
  - tomato, tomato juice

## Dumping syndrome

Dumping syndrome is when food leaves ('dumps' from) the stomach too quickly. It can happen as early as 30 minutes after eating, up to 3 hours after.

Signs of dumping syndrome:

- diarrhea, stomach pain, or cramping
- difficulty concentrating
- drop in blood pressure
- faster heartbeat
- feeling:
  - bloated or full
  - like you need to lie down right away
  - nervous or shaky
  - weak or dizzy
- flushing or sweating
- nausea or vomiting

If you have signs of dumping syndrome:  
Let your doctor or healthcare team know.  
Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) to learn how to manage dumping syndrome.

## Losing weight

Losing some weight is common after surgery.

Keep track of your weight. Weigh yourself every week and write it down.

If you don't have a scale, you may be able to tell if you are losing weight by how your clothes fit. If they get looser, you may be losing weight.

- You may need to eat more food or eat more often.
- Try to eat foods higher in calories and protein.
- If your appetite is poor, try a smoothie or a nutrition supplement drink in between meals.
  - See the "Nutrition supplement drinks and protein powders" section for details.

If you are worried about your weight or are having trouble maintaining your weight:

- Contact your healthcare team.
- Call 811 and ask to speak with a dietitian,
- Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) and browse the topic filter "Getting more calories and protein" for meal, snack, and recipe ideas.

## Meal and snack ideas

When you are ready for soft foods, use the sample meal plan below for meal and snack ideas. The food list (page 5) can give you more ideas.

Try making small changes every 1–2 weeks.

### Meal 1 (breakfast)

- hardboiled egg 1 egg
- toast, crustless 1 slice
- jelly 1 tsp (5 mL)
- soft margarine 1 tsp (5 mL)
- soft fruit, like banana or canned pears ½ cup (125 mL)

### Snack 1 (morning)

- canned fruit ½ cup (125 mL)
- cottage cheese ½ cup (125 mL)

### Meal 2 (lunch)

- pasta ½ cup (125 mL)
- meat sauce ¼–½ cup (60–125 mL)
- soft, cooked vegetables ½ cup (125 mL)
- Greek yogurt ½ cup (125 mL)

### Snack 2 (afternoon)

- canned tuna ¼ cup (60 mL)
- cheese 1½ oz (50 g)
- soda crackers 2–3 crackers
- high protein nutrition supplement drink ½ cup (125 mL)

### Meal 3 (dinner or supper)

- soft meat, poultry, or fish 3 oz (90 g)
- mashed potatoes or congee ½ cup (125 mL)
- soft, cooked vegetables ½ cup (125 mL)
- soft margarine 1 tsp (5 mL)
- soft fruit ½ cup (125 mL)

### Snack 3 (evening)

- pudding or Greek yogurt ½ cup (125 mL)
- high protein nutrition supplement drink ½ cup (125 mL)

# Foods after surgery

The table below lists examples of foods that are often tolerated well after surgery. Gradually add some of the “limit after surgery” foods as you feel ready.

| Eat after surgery   | Limit after surgery   |
|---|---|
| <b>Vegetables and fruits</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• soft fresh fruit without skins or seeds, such as bananas, peeled pears, or peeled peaches</li> <li>• vegetable and fruit juices</li> <li>• vegetables, canned or well cooked, skins and seeds removed</li> <li>• vegetables in soups, sauces, and stews</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fruits with seeds, skins, and membranes, like oranges or grapefruits</li> <li>• raw vegetables</li> <li>• stringy or hard vegetables or fruit, like asparagus stems, broccoli stems, celery, green beans, rhubarb, pineapple, coconut, or dried fruit</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Grains</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cereals softened with milk</li> <li>• cooked cereals like cream of wheat, oat bran, cream of rice, or congee</li> <li>• crackers or plain cookies (chew well)</li> <li>• pasta or barley, cooked until soft</li> <li>• rice cooked until soft (not sticky), with sauce added</li> <li>• toast without crust</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chewy or doughy breads, like bagels, English muffins, pitas, pizza, sandwiches, or soft tortillas</li> <li>• soft breads that become gummy after chewing like fresh bread, or dinner rolls</li> <li>• foods with nuts, seeds, or dried fruit</li> <li>• hard, chewy granola or cereal bars</li> <li>• hard crackers, Melba toast</li> <li>• wild rice</li> </ul> |
| <b>High protein foods (milk and dairy products)</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all types of milk</li> <li>• grated cheese</li> <li>• smooth milk pudding, yogurt, custard</li> <li>• soft or brick cheeses</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dairy products with hard fruit pieces like coconut, dried fruit, seeds, nuts, or granola</li> <li>• stringy or crispy cooked cheese</li> </ul>   |
| <b>High protein foods (meat, poultry, fish, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds)</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• beans, lentils</li> <li>• canned or flaked meat</li> <li>• eggs (poached, boiled, or scrambled)</li> <li>• meat, fish, poultry, or shellfish, minced or ground with sauces or gravies</li> <li>• smooth nut or seed butters</li> <li>• soft, moist casseroles or stews</li> <li>• soft tofu</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bacon, bacon bits</li> <li>• crispy coatings on meats, chicken, and fish</li> <li>• crunchy nut or seed butters</li> <li>• dry, tough, stringy meat, fish, or poultry like chicken wings, dry ribs, or spareribs</li> <li>• eggs (fried), quiche</li> <li>• meat with casings like hot dogs and sausages</li> <li>• nuts, seeds</li> </ul>                       |
| <b>Other foods</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fats like cooking oil, margarine, or butter</li> <li>• ice cream, frozen yogurt, milkshakes, gelatin-based desserts</li> <li>• jelly, jam, marmalade</li> <li>• plain cream cheese, cheese spread</li> <li>• smooth condiments like mustard, or mayonnaise</li> <li>• smooth soups</li> <li>• sugar, sugar substitutes, honey</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cake, pie, pastries</li> <li>• carbonated (fizzy) drinks like pop or soda water</li> <li>• chocolate, hard candy, toffee, licorice</li> <li>• deep fried foods</li> <li>• popcorn, chips, hard tacos, pretzels</li> </ul>  |

# Smoothie recipes

**Directions:** Combine ingredients in a blender. Blend until smooth. Use more liquid for a thinner drink. Drink small amounts (½ cup or 125 mL) at a time.

## Peach tofu smoothie

|                |                                    |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 cup (250 mL) | canned peaches, drained            |
| 1 cup (250 mL) | vanilla nutrition supplement drink |
| ½ cup (125 mL) | canned coconut milk                |
| ½ cup (125 mL) | soft tofu                          |
| Optional       | almond extract                     |

## Raspberry yogurt smoothie

|                |                               |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup (250 mL) | raspberries (fresh or frozen) |
| 1 cup (250 mL) | raspberry Greek yogurt        |
| 2 Tbsp (30 mL) | 3.25% (whole) milk            |
| ¼ cup (60 mL)  | white beans                   |
| Optional       | vanilla extract               |

## Chocolate peanut butter smoothie

|                |                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 cup (250 mL) | banana                           |
| 1 cup (250 mL) | chocolate fortified soy beverage |
| ⅓ cup (30 mL)  | oats                             |
| 2 Tbsp (30 mL) | smooth peanut butter             |
| Optional       | cocoa powder                     |

## Ginger pear smoothie

|                 |                                 |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 cup (250 mL)  | canned pears, drained           |
| 1 cup (250 mL)  | 3.25% (whole) milk              |
| 2 Tbsp (30 mL)  | wheat germ                      |
| 1 scoop (60 mL) | vanilla or plain protein powder |
| ¼ cup (60 mL)   | cottage cheese                  |
| Optional        | ground nutmeg and ginger        |

## For more information

- Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts)  
Search by topic:
  - after surgery
  - getting more calories and protein
  - dysphagia (swallowing difficulties)
- Visit [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca).  
Search for:
  - [High-calorie and high-protein recipes](#) for recipes and to watch videos of dietitians make the recipes.

## More support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://ahs.ca/Nutrition).
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta ([ab.211.ca/](https://ab.211.ca/)) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.

