

# Esophageal Surgery Nutrition Guidebook



# Contact Information and Locations

## **Thoracic Surgery Clinic**

67 Belmont Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Worcester, MA 01605  
(508) 334-8996

## **UMass Memorial Medical Center – Memorial Campus**

119 Belmont Street  
Worcester, MA 01605  
(508) 334-1000

## **UMass Memorial Medical Center - University Campus**

55 Lake Ave  
Worcester, MA 01605  
(508) 334-1000



# Nutrition

- Learning about nutrition will be a vital part of your preparation for and recovery from surgery.
- Your body needs more protein than usual to heal after major surgery.
- Surgery performed on the esophagus and/or stomach will affect the foods you eat. It is important to learn ways to boost your nutrition before and after surgery. This also helps you to become accustomed to changes before your surgical recovery begins.
- Common changes that patients describe are:
  - Loss of appetite and nausea
  - Gas and bloating
  - Can only eat small amounts before feeling full
  - Food tastes differently – many describe a metallic taste
  - Loose stools
- In order to make your recovery as easy as possible, your diet will start with liquids and slowly advance to soft foods, followed by a regular diet. This generally takes 4-6 weeks after surgery is completed. Some patients will recover more quickly, and changes to this guideline can be discussed with your surgeon.
- The following pages will help you to overcome common challenges and give you helpful tips for your recovery.

# Nutrition

**The Challenge:** many people have a poor appetite after abdominal surgery. Nausea, gas, and bloating can also make it difficult to eat regular meals.

- **Solutions:**

- Have ginger products at home to help with nausea. Candied ginger, ginger snap cookies, and ginger tea can all help.
- After surgery, plan to eat or drink every 1-2 hours through the day.
- Use a salad plate to limit your portions.
- Start with a few tablespoons of each food until your appetite begins to increase.
- Avoid high gas producing foods such as beans, brussel sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, corn, garlic, lentils, sauerkraut, turnips, onions, and scallions
- Try to avoid “swallowing air” by avoiding use of straws, chewing gum, and drinking carbonated beverages

- **How do small meals help me?**

- Eating small amounts prevents pain and bloating.
- Small meals encourage snacking and can increase the total amount of food you eat over the day.

# Nutrition

**The Challenge:** Many patients feel full with small amounts of food. This makes it challenging to eat enough calories for healing.

- **Solutions:**

- Eat many tiny meals during the day (at least 5 or 6).
- Include a protein, vegetable, and carbohydrate in each meal.
- Purchase powdered milk – this is an easy way to increase your protein without adding a large amount of food.
  - Add to tea or coffee along with your usual milk or cream
  - Mix into the milk for your breakfast cereal
  - Add to scrambled eggs before cooking (this makes one egg have the protein of two)
  - Blend with fruit and yogurt for a healthy snack or smoothie (add peanut butter for added protein and flavor)
  - Add to mashed potatoes
  - Mix into creamy soups
- Drink protein shakes as a snack between small plates.
- A small amount of fat may be added to meals for extra calories (less than 1 Tbsp of butter, margarine, or oil)

# Nutrition

**The challenge:** Food does not taste the same as before surgery. This is especially common for patients who have had chemotherapy prior to surgery.

*Important facts: it is not unusual to find that foods do not taste the same after abdominal surgery. Some patients describe a metallic taste; especially if your pancreas was involved in your procedure. If you notice a metallic taste, this may persist for 4-6 weeks after surgery.*

- **Solutions:**

- Use plastic silverware
- Use glass cups or mugs
- Avoid Styrofoam – this can also trigger a metallic taste in some people
- Try starting your meals with cantaloupe or pineapple. Some patients say that these fruits seem to prevent a metallic taste during their meal. .
- Many patients say that cinnamon is a pleasant flavor during this time.

# Nutrition

**The Challenge:** Many patients with esophageal surgery report loose stools after eating a meal. This is called “dumping syndrome”.

*\*Important fact: tube feeding formulas sometimes cause loose stools. Dumping syndrome is different. It occurs after eating a meal and is often related to the types of foods that you are eating.*

- **Solutions:**

- Keep a food diary help you see what foods are more/less helpful.
- Avoid foods and drinks that have lots of sugar or are very sweet.
- Trial tolerate lactose-free dairy if lactose is poorly tolerated
- Eat solid meals and drink liquids 30 minutes between or after meals
- Try a food containing soluble fiber such as unsweetened applesauce or oatmeal to help reduce symptoms
- Avoid fried or greasy foods
- Chew your foods very well
- Eat slowly and relax while eating
- Remain sitting upright for at least 30 minutes after a meal
- Ask your doctor if you should be taking vitamin B12 or a calcium supplement

# Nutrition

<u>Foods to eat</u>	<u>Foods to avoid</u>
<b>Protein foods</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Chicken/Turkey</li><li>•Fish</li><li>•Pork</li><li>•Creamy peanut butter</li><li>•Eggs</li><li>•Cottage cheese</li><li>•Milk</li><li>•Tofu</li></ul>	<b>Protein foods</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beef</li></ul> <p><i>Beef is difficult to digest and can cause cramping</i></p>
<b>Vegetables (always cooked)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Peas</li><li>•Carrots</li><li>•Green/wax beans</li><li>•Beets</li><li>•Potatoes (white, sweet, yams without skin)</li></ul>	<b>Vegetables</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•All raw vegetables</li><li>•Salad</li><li>•Broccoli</li><li>•Cauliflower</li><li>•Corn</li></ul>
<b>Fruit (remove skin)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•All fruits</li><li>•Eat small portions to avoid diarrhea</li></ul>	<b>Fruit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Eat small portions to avoid diarrhea</li><li>•Dried fruits</li></ul>
<b>Grains</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Unsweetened dry cereals</li><li>•Hot cereals (farina, cream of wheat, oatmeal), noodles, pasta, rice</li></ul>	<b>Grains</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Soft, doughy breads such as English muffins, bagels, rolls, and breads</li></ul>
<b>Beverages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Protein shakes</li><li>•Sugar free beverages</li><li>•Water</li></ul>	<b>Beverages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Juices, sodas, and sugary drinks can cause diarrhea</li></ul>

**\*Remember\*** These diet changes are designed for the first 6 weeks after surgery. After 6 weeks, you may slowly introduce your regular diet. Keep in mind, all patients are different with what they do and do not tolerate. It may be helpful to keep a food diary which may help you recognize patterns.



# FAQ's

- When will my portion size return to normal?
  - Your portion size will slowly increase over time. For most people it can return to normal over the course of several months. For some people, their portion size is always slightly smaller than before surgery.
- My surgery required a feeding tube. How long do I need to keep this tube?
  - Most people need their feeding tube for at least four weeks after going home. The key to removing your feeding tube as soon as possible is to eat many small meals every day. Once you are able to eat normally, your tube feeding will be decreased and eventually stopped.
- Why are my legs swelling?
  - Low blood protein can cause swelling in patients who have had major surgery. If your swelling is caused by low blood protein, the best treatment is to increase the amount of protein you are eating.
- What exercises can I do?
  - After surgery you should avoid heavy lifting for at least 12 weeks.
  - Once your body has healed from surgery you should increase your activity and exercise. Walking is the easiest place to start.
  - The YMCA has a free training program for all cancer patients. It is a great way to improve your recovery from cancer treatment!
- Is whey protein better than powdered milk?
  - Powdered milk includes whey protein and has additional proteins. This combination is better for recovery than whey protein alone. Also, powdered milk is easier to mix into other foods as it has less flavor.