

LOW FAT DIET ADVICE SHEET

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Information about why and how you should have a low fat diet.

Your doctor has said that you should have a low fat diet. The commonest reason for advising a low fat diet is because you have gallstones, problems with your gallbladder or pancreas or simply need to lose weight.

Why does fat affect my gallbladder?

The gallbladder is a small pear-shaped bag just beneath the liver that stores the bile produced in the liver between meals. Bile is necessary to digest the fat in the diet. When food enters the stomach after a meal the gallbladder contracts and expels the bile into the bowel to help digest the food. Although the gallbladder will contract with any food, or even if you just think about food, it contracts longer and harder after a meal that has a high fat content. If you have gallstones, when the gallbladder contracts, the gallstones can get stuck in the duct or outlet from the gallbladder and this can cause intense pain that may last for several hours. If you have gallstones then reducing the fat in your diet may reduce the attacks of pain.

What is the diet and how does it work?

The aim of the diet is to reduce the entire dietary fat intake. Fat, however, is important in your diet, in that it does provide useful fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids. In addition, fat helps give the stomach the feeling of fullness. With very low fat diets, some people may notice they become hungry more quickly.

The emphasis is on a well balanced, healthy diet. You may eat as much carbohydrates or starch such as bread, pasta, rice and potatoes, as you like. You should also eat at least five helpings of fresh fruit and vegetables each day. Ensure that you drink plenty of fluids and reduce the fat in your diet with the help of the following suggestions.

Simple changes to try:

- Avoid full fat milk - use skimmed milk. Semi-skimmed may be taken as an alternative if skimmed milk you cannot manage skimmed milk
- Use a low fat spread as an alternative to butter or margarine
- Eat only small servings of meat and avoid any visible fat or skin; poultry such as chicken and turkey are lower in fat than red meats, duck is high fat. Avoid all pork products such as sausages and bacon
- Avoid pies made with pastry, which is high fat
- Choose white fish, and avoid the oily varieties
- Traditional cheeses are high in fat. If eaten, have only very small quantities - try low fat cheeses or cottage cheese instead
- Eggs may be taken in moderation if not fried. All the fat is in the yolk – egg whites are fine
- Choose plain boiled rice or noodles instead of pilau rice, fried rice and fried noodles
- Avoid fried foods - bake, boil, and grill or steam foods without added fat or oils
- Avoid cakes, biscuits and pastries. Some low fat or reduced fat biscuits are acceptable
- Italian breads made with olive oil, and Indian bread made with fat should be avoided - all other breads are acceptable
- Avocado is the only high fat vegetable and should be avoided.
- Choose fat free dressings to replace mayonnaise and salad dressings
- Change to low fat yoghurts and desserts such as jellies and sorbets, instead of the creamy desserts
- All fruits whether fresh, frozen or tinned are fine
- Use low fat fromage frais as an alternative to cream
- Chocolates and toffees should be avoided, but boiled sweets and jelly sweets are fine
- Nuts are high in fat. The only exceptions are water chestnuts and chestnuts
- Avoid peanut and chocolate spreads - jams, honey and marmalade are allowed
- All alcoholic drinks, with the exception of cream liqueurs such as Bailey's and Advocat type drinks, are suitable for low fat diets. If you have had pancreatitis you should avoid alcohol completely – ask your doctor about this

Will the diet harm me?

Completely fat free or very low fat diets should be avoided unless required for medical reasons; low fat diets (not strict) can be used without causing problems.

Very low fat diets may be low in fat-soluble vitamins, A, D, E, and K. and may require nutritional supplements. Low fat spreads are fortified with fat-soluble vitamins (similar to the levels found in butter) and also contain some fatty acids; they should not be omitted from the diet even though they still provide some fat.

Essential fatty acid deficiency has also been noted in some people, who have followed very low fat diets for prolonged periods of time. This manifests itself as very dry skin.

What else do I need to know?

Milk is sometimes excluded from the diet as the full fat variety is high in fat, and it is thought that avoiding milk is the best option. However, it is also a good source of calcium and therefore good for the bones, helping to prevent osteoporosis. Lower fat milks such as skimmed or semi-skimmed should be used, or ensure that the diet contains an alternative source of calcium.

You might find this guide useful if you're checking the nutritional information on food labels:

This is a lot of fat:

20 g fat or more per 100 g

5 g saturates or more per 100 g

This is a little fat:

3 g fat or less per 100 g

1 g saturates or less per 100 g

If the amount is between the figures given here, this is a moderate amount of fat.

I hope that you have found this leaflet helpful. If you require further information please ask your nurse or doctor.