

Eating to Feel Better with Liver Disease

Nourishing Food Advice - Improving Nutrition

When your liver is not working well or when you have liver disease your body needs extra energy (calories) and protein. Malnutrition (weight loss and muscle wasting) is common in people with liver disease.

Malnutrition is often caused by:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Feeling full easily which may be due to ascites (when too much fluid builds up in your abdomen)

Good nutrition is vital to:

- Stop muscle wasting and weight loss
- Improve strength and mobility
- Help manage ascites
- Help recovery from illness

This leaflet gives you some ideas on how to improve your food intake by making the most of what you eat and drink.



How do I improve my nutrition?

It is important to eat a wide variety of foods and fluids to reduce the risk of malnutrition.

Carbohydrate:

This is the body's main source of energy. If your liver is not working properly, your body uses up its energy quickly. Try to avoid long periods of time during the day without eating. It is important that you try to eat meals and snacks containing starchy carbohydrate every 2-3 hours to provide enough energy to stop your body breaking down its own muscles. At bedtime it is important for you to eat a large snack containing carbohydrate to provide the energy you need overnight (see list of bedtime snack suggestions). Starchy carbohydrate foods include: bread, breakfast cereals, pasta, noodles, rice and potatoes, savoury biscuits.

Protein:

Including eating extra protein in your diet can help to prevent further muscle breakdown and re-build lost muscle. It is important to include a good source of protein in at least 3-4 of your meals and snacks. Protein rich foods and fluids include meat, fish, and meat substitutes such as tofu, soya and Quorn, beans, pulses, cheese, eggs. Milk-based drinks, yoghurts. Custards and rice pudding.

Salt:

If you have ascites or oedema (build-up of fluid in the body), reducing the salt in your diet can help improve this. A small amount of salt is naturally found in food and a proportion is added during cooking or at the table. However, the largest percentage of salt is present in processed or convenience foods such as packaged ready and tinned meals, salted and cheese snacks, crisps, processed meats and takeaway foods.

Try to avoid regularly having foods high in salt. Check food labels to see how much salt is in a portion of food. The table below is colour coded like a traffic light system. You can use it to work out if the food has high, medium or low amounts of salt in it. Aim for foods colour coded green or amber, and limit your intake of foods coded red.

| High/100g | Medium/100g | Low/100g |
|-----------|-------------|----------------|
| Over 1.5g | 0.3-1.5g | Less than 0.3g |

*Note that these values are per 100g and not per portion.

Aim for less than 5 grams of salt per day without overly restricting your food intake.

Tips to reduce salt intake:

Try to cook meals fresh if possible. Do not add salt or salt substitutes, for example, LoSalt or Pansalt to your food at the table. Only use a pinch of salt in cooking. Use herbs and spices for added flavour.

Suggested Meal Plan

The list below gives some helpful meal and snack ideas. It is not advised to take the high sugar foods marked with * regularly if you have Diabetes.

You may find it easier to gain extra nourishment and calories by eating smaller amounts more often; you do not need to eat full meals. Add extra nourishment into meals and snacks by adding foods such as butter, cheese, cream and sauces. Try to include a nourishing drink alongside your meal such as milk.

Breakfast

- Porridge or a breakfast cereal with full-fat milk and added sugar*, honey* or golden syrup*
- Toast with butter or spread and jam*, marmalade*, peanut butter, chocolate spread*, scrambled egg or spreading cheese
- Full fat yoghurts, try adding fresh or stewed fruits
- Pancakes or pastries, with added jam* and butter

Mid-morning Snack

- Plain biscuits
- Unsalted crisps, crackers or crisp breads
- Cake, tea cake, scone, malt loaf, muffin or pancake
- Slice of toast and butter
- Add butter, jam* or cheese for more nourishment.

Lunch

- Choose fresh cooked meat, fish tinned in spring water or oil, egg, cheese or reduced salt baked beans and use:
 - ▶ In a sandwich or on toast
 - ▶ To fill a baked potato
 - ▶ To make a salad with pasta, noodles, potatoes or bread
- Try homemade soup with bread and butter.

Dessert

- Yoghurt, Rice pudding, custard, ice cream, mousse or trifle
- Plain cake and cream or ice cream
- Fruit (canned or fresh) with custard, cream or ice cream
- Cheese and unsalted cracker

Mid-afternoon Snack

- Plain biscuits
- Unsalted crisps, crackers or crisp breads
- Plain cake, tea cake, scone, malt loaf, muffin or pancake
- Slice of toast and butter
- Add butter, jam*, cheese for more nourishment.

Evening Meal

- Meat, fish or meat alternatives with potatoes or chips and vegetables
- Pasta, sauce and meat, fish, cheese or beans
- Meat, fish or lentil curry and rice, naan or chapatti
- Meat, stew and rice
- Spaghetti Bolognese or Lasagne
- Chilled, frozen or microwave meals - check labels to choose lower salt versions.

Dessert

- Yoghurt, Rice pudding, custard, ice cream, mousse or trifle
- Plain cake and cream or ice cream
- Fruit (canned or fresh) with custard, cream or ice cream
- Cheese and unsalted cracker.

Bedtime Snack

- 2 slices of bread or toast with butter and jam* and a 300ml glass of milk
- 1 bowl of breakfast cereal with milk and a 300ml glass of milk
- 2-3 pancakes with butter and jam*
- 1 slice of cake and a 300ml glass of milk
- 1 scone and a 300ml glass of milk
- 1 cup of hot chocolate, Horlicks or Ovaltine and 2 slices of bread or toast
- 5 digestive biscuits or 3 sweet cookies
- 1 filled sandwich made with 2 slices of bread and a 300ml glass of milk.

If you don't like milk, have a piece of fruit or fruit juice instead

