

# Eating Well After Stomach Surgery

Stomach (gastric) surgery changes the size of your stomach and how it works.

There are 2 types of stomach surgeries:

- Partial gastrectomy: Part of the stomach is removed.
- Total gastrectomy: The whole stomach is removed.

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 (heartburn)
- have pain or discomfort after eating
- have trouble maintaining weight or gaining it back if you have lost weight

This handout includes tips to help you get enough nutrition and 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

## 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 easier and safer 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.

## 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.

- 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 body will adapt, and you will be able to eat more.

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



If you have nutrition 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](https://ahs.ca/811).

## Get enough nutrition

Because of the smaller amount of food your digestive system 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
- 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.

Sip on nutrition supplement drinks between meals to get 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 (see page 3 for details), 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 mineral supplements

Your body may not be able to absorb some nutrients from food as well as it 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.

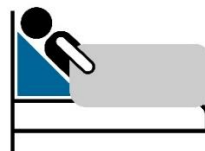
## Managing side effects

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

### Acid reflux or heartburn

Reflux (heartburn) is when you have food, stomach acid, or fluids from your gut (like bile) back up into your throat 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 and torso higher than the rest of your body. 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	– foods that give you gas
– caffeine	– high fat foods
– citrus fruits and juices (oranges, grapefruit)	– spicy food
	– tomato, tomato juice

## Diarrhea

If you have diarrhea, drink lots of liquids to stay hydrated.

If milk gives you gas or diarrhea, you may have lactose intolerance. Try to eat yogurt and cheese or use lactose free milk. This may get better over time.

The foods below may help thicken or add bulk to your poop:

- applesauce
- bananas
- barley
- bread
- cheese
- oatmeal
- pasta
- potatoes
- rice
- smooth peanut butter
- tapioca
- yogurt

## Feeling full quickly

You may feel full easily, have pain, nausea, or vomit when eating. This may be because there is too much food in your stomach or gut.

- Eat every 2–3 hours to allow for digestion.
- Eat 4–6 small meals each day. Smaller meals will help your stomach or gut 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

## Dumping syndrome

Dumping syndrome is when food leaves, or dumps, too quickly into your gut.

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

Signs of dumping syndrome can start as early as 10 minutes after eating or can be 1–3 hours after a meal.



If you have signs of dumping syndrome: Let your doctor or healthcare team know.

Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://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.
- Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) and browse the topic filter “Getting more calories and protein” for meal, snack, and recipe ideas.

# 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.

# Meal and snack ideas

When you are ready for soft foods, use the sample menu below for meal and snack ideas.

Over time, slowly add different foods to your meals. Your serving sizes can slowly increase as your appetite improves.

Meal 1 (breakfast)	
• hardboiled egg	1 egg
• toast, crustless	1 slice
• jelly	1 tsp (5 mL)
• soft margarine	1 tsp (5 mL)

Snack 1 (morning)	
• canned fruit	½ cup (125 mL)
• cheese	1 oz (30 g)

Meal 2 (lunch)	
• sandwich with soft filling like tuna or egg salad	½ sandwich
• soft, cooked vegetables	½ cup (125 mL)
• soft fruit, like a banana	1 fruit
• Greek yogurt	¾ cup (175 mL)

Snack 2 (afternoon)	
• soda crackers	2–4 crackers
• smooth peanut butter	1 Tbsp (15 mL)

Meal 3 (dinner or supper)	
• soft meat, poultry, or fish	2 ½ oz (70 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	¾ cup (175 mL)
• soft cookies, plain	2

Drinks between meals and snacks	
Tea, coffee, milk, smoothies, water, or nutrition supplement drinks	