

What can I eat after having my gallbladder removed? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am taking a nutrition class. Last week, we were talking about the GI tract. I asked what happens to a person if they have their gallbladder removed. What are the implications in their diet? Do they have to stop eating fat or just start eating a low-fat diet? Will the system still digest fat, but now is it only harder?

Answer

Dear Reader,

How amazing is it that part of the human body can be removed and it'll still work like a well-oiled machine? The story of gallbladder removal (or cholecystectomy) is just one example of how adaptable bodies can be. The gallbladder, an organ near the liver, acts like a reservoir for bile to be stored and used to digest fats later when needed. But, even once it's removed, the body can still produce the bile just like before. And, more to your line of questioning, some people may notice changes in digestion and need to alter their diets after a cholecystectomy either temporarily or permanently (no two patients are the same!). However, many people are able to return to business as usual within a few days or weeks. Even though fats sometimes get a bad rap, they are a key part of your body's dietary needs, and fortunately, the gallbladder-less can still reap the benefits.

There are no universally recommended diets for those who've recently parted with their gallbladder. However, there are some general suggestions that dietitians recommend to help get the digestive tract running as smoothly as possible after surgery:

- **Eat smaller, frequent meals** so that the digestive tract can work with smaller amounts of food at a time without its reservoir of bile.
- **Avoid high-fat foods right after surgery** to give the body time to compensate and adjust to the decreased amount of bile.
- **Slowly increase fiber intake**, which can help with diarrhea.
- **Avoid caffeinated beverages, spicy foods, and dairy right after surgery**, which might upset or irritate the digestive tract until it has a chance to bounce back.

List adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#) [2].

The newly gallbladder-less might also want to consider how other side effects from surgery may impact their lives. The most common technique is the laparoscopic surgery, which involves a few small incisions to insert a small camera and instruments and remove it as noninvasively as possible. With this procedure, the risk of complications, such as infection, are low and pain usually decreases significantly after three days. For patients with abdominal scarring or other conditions, an open surgery might be done instead. This carries a slightly higher risk of complications (infection, bruising at the site, or urine retention), but it's also a low-risk procedure. Gallbladder removals carry little risk relative to other procedures, but it's probably good to be prepared for some pain and discomfort in the days following either type of surgery.

Gallbladder removal may leave those who have it an organ lighter, but chances are they'll hardly miss it. Maintaining a balanced diet with lots of fruits, veggies, and whole grains, listening to the body's signals, and keeping in touch with a health care provider about any concerns can help them carry on just as they did before, fats and all!

Alice!

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