Dietary information for people with gallstones

What are gallstones?
There are two main types of gallstones:
- Cholesterol gallstones – which consist of cholesterol, a type of fat. These are the most common type of gallstone and account for around 80% of cases.
- Bile pigment gallstones – formed from bile pigments, which are the waste products of old red blood cells.

What do gallstones look like?
Gallstones are small, dark brown and solid, they form in your gallbladder, which is an organ close to your liver. Gallstones can be the size of a pea or bigger, or some people may have lots of stones, which are like gravel, or grains of sand.

How common are gallstones?
Gallstones are very common. They are unusual in younger people and become more common as we get older. It is more common for women to develop gallstones than men. Gallstones tend to run in families and being overweight increases your chances of getting gallstones.

Do I need to have a special diet if I have gallstones?
The simple answer is No.
It is recommended that people with gallstones should try and follow a ‘healthy eating’ pattern. This is no different to what everyone else should follow. By having a healthy diet you may be able to reduce the symptoms associated with your gallstones e.g. pain – however, diet alone is not a treatment for gallstones.

The Eat Well Place plate model is a pictorial representation of the types and proportions of foods needed to make up a healthy and well-balanced diet. "Reproduced by kind permission of the Food Standards Agency"
The Eat Well Plate encourages us to do the following:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Eat regular meals and try not to skip meals.

Fruit and vegetables

- Choose a wide variety; aim for 5 servings a day e.g. an apple, a banana, 2 slices of mango, 2 spoons of vegetables and a glass of pure fruit juice. These can be fresh, frozen, canned fruit and vegetables and dried fruit.

Bread, other cereals and potatoes

- Other cereals include; breakfast cereals, pasta, rice, oats, chapatti, noodles, maize, millet, cornmeal. Beans and pulses can also be eaten as part of this group. Eat all types and choose high fibre types whenever you can. Try to base your meals on starchy foods e.g. breakfast cereal or toast in the morning, cobs or bread at lunch and potatoes, pasta, rice, naan or chapatti with evening meal.

Meat, fish and alternatives

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, lentils and pulses. Choose low fat options wherever you can. These foods are a good source of protein and you should eat moderate amounts on a daily basis e.g. baked beans on toast at lunch, lean meat with evening meal.

Milk and dairy foods

- Milk, cheese, paneer, yoghurt and fromage frais. Eat moderate amounts of these daily and try to choose lower fat varieties e.g. milk with cereal in the morning, cottage cheese and salad sandwich at lunch and yoghurt as a dessert in the evening.

Fatty and sugary foods

Eat foods containing fat especially saturated fats sparingly and look for lower fat alternatives. Foods containing sugar should not be eaten too often. Aim just to have as a treat.
What if I am in pain?

You may find that certain foods upsets your stomach or may cause discomfort. If this is the case then it may be best to avoid these foods. For example:

- **Fatty foods** – by following a healthy diet you will be cutting down on the amount of fat in your diet, this may help to control your pain by letting your gallbladder rest. It is the contractions of your gallbladder which cause your pain. A low fat diet is also a good idea for general health and weight control. If you are overweight, you may wish to reduce your weight.

Occasionally with gallstones you may experience acute or sudden, severe pain - if this is the case you may benefit from fasting for 6-8 hours. If your pain is very severe or continues for long periods of time you may wish to seek medical advice.

Ways to eat less fat

- Use a thin scraping of margarine or low fat spread – try not to choose butter or ghee.
- Try to grill, dry roast, oven bake, boil, steam or microwave rather than roasting with fat or frying.
- If you need to fry use as little oil as possible and measure it with a teaspoon - 1 teaspoon per person.
- Remove visible fat from meat and poultry.
- Reduce the amount of fatty foods such as sausages, corned beef, and burgers. Choose low fat versions where possible.
- Cut down on pastry dishes – try potato topped savoury pies, or fresh, tinned or stewed fruit instead of fruit pies.
- Choose lower fat dairy products such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, half fat hard cheeses, Edam, cottage cheese or reduced fat cheese spreads. Opt for low fat or diet yoghurts or fromage frais.
- Cut down on fatty snacks such as cakes, chocolates biscuits, Bombay mix and crisps and replace with fresh or dried fruit, teacake, malt loaf or a plain scone if necessary.

Ways to eat less sugar

Cutting down on sugary food is part of a healthy diet and can help your reduce weight if you are overweight, try these suggestions:

- Avoid adding sugar to drinks and cereals – try a sweetener if needed.
- Choose a breakfast cereal with no added sugar.
- Choose low calorie/diet drinks or no added sugar soft drinks.
- Have fresh or tinned fruits in natural juice (not syrup) with low fat yoghurt or custard instead of high sugar puddings.
- Cut down on sweets, chocolates, cakes and biscuits and try sugar free jelly, or mousses.
Mealtime suggestions

Breakfast

- High fibre cereal, with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and a banana and a small glass of unsweetened fruit juice.
- Wholemeal toast with low fat spread and a scraping of marmalade.
- Porridge made with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk/water.
- Boiled, poached or scrambled egg with wholemeal toast.

Main meals

- Lean chicken, beef or pork with jacket potato and salad.
- Lentil Dahl with boiled rice/ chapatti.
- Roast beef, with boiled potato, vegetables and gravy.
- Grilled fish, mashed potato and vegetables or salad.
- Quorn, vegetables and pasta in a tomato sauce.
- Spaghetti Bolognese with extra vegetables.

Light meals/ snacks

- Sandwiches made from bread, rolls, pitta or crispbread filled with lean meats/egg/low fat cheese/fish or salad.
- Rice or pasta salad.
- Jacket potato and beans/ tuna salad.
- Dahl.

Snacks (if needed)

- Fresh, tinned or dried fruit.
- Low fat/ diet yoghurt.
- Plain tea cake, scone, muffin, crumpets, crisp bread or plain biscuit e.g. Rich Tea.

Diet is one aspect in the treatment of gallstones along with other forms of treatment; if you are concerned about any other aspect of this treatment please speak to your Dietitian, Specialist nurse or Surgeon.

You may find the following website useful:
www.gallstonesurgery.co.uk
www.lnds.nhs.uk

Patient Name:
Dietitian/Specialist Nurse Name:
Contact Number: