



# What You Need To Know About Gastric (Stomach) Cancer & Nutrition

Patient Education & Empowerment Series



**gi cancers**  
ALLIANCE

A Powerful, Unified Voice For  
The Gastrointestinal Cancer Community

[www.GICancersAlliance.org](http://www.GICancersAlliance.org)

# Nutrition Guidelines for Gastric Cancer

**Following a well-balanced diet during and after cancer treatment can help you feel better, maintain your strength, and speed your recovery.** Aim to optimize your nutrition and improve therapy outcomes by maintaining lean muscle and staying at a healthy weight. A well-balanced and mostly plant based diet will include healthy fats, lean proteins, and complex carbohydrates. Examples of these foods are listed below.

- **Fats** – Oils (olive, canola, peanut, sesame, soybean, safflower), avocados, olives, nuts and nut butters, seeds (sunflower, sesame, pumpkin, flax), fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring, trout, sardines), soymilk, tofu
- **Proteins** – Seafood, poultry, nuts and seeds, dairy (yogurt, milk, cottage cheese), legumes (lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, pinto beans, etc.), eggs, quinoa, tofu
- **Carbohydrates** – Whole wheat & whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice, barley, farro), legumes, vegetables (sweet potato, beets, carrots, corn., etc.), fruits, dairy



## Foods to limit:

- Processed foods and foods high in sodium (including salt preserved foods)
- Alcohol
- Grilled and processed meats

## Vitamin & Mineral Supplements

Nutrients such as vitamins and minerals are essential for our bodies to work properly. While a balanced and varied diet is the best way to get nutrients, there may be some instances where gastric cancers can prevent the absorption of nutrients from food. **It is important to talk to a health professional before taking any vitamins or supplements.** Some medications and cancer treatments may interact with vitamins and supplements.

## Hydration

Prevent dehydration by drinking enough fluids during cancer treatment. Aim to drink 64 ounces of fluid daily. Avoid drinking large amounts of caffeinated beverages as too much caffeine can lead to dehydration.

## Managing Specific Nutrition Related Symptoms

Individuals with stomach cancer may have trouble eating and digesting food as a result of treatments and physical changes to the digestive tract. Common symptoms can include loss of appetite, unintentional weight loss, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, heartburn, and taste changes. It's best to speak to your registered dietitian for personalized recommendations to combat these symptoms and to prevent unwanted weight loss.

### Unintentional weight loss and loss of appetite:

- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day)
- Take advantage of times you feel stronger during the day to eat (often earlier in the day)
- Make sure surroundings are conducive to eating (low stress)
- Set goals for eating (e.g., frequency of meals, portion size goals)
- Consider incorporating nutritional supplement drinks (e.g., Ensure, Boost) if recommended by your healthcare team
- Aim for high protein and calorie foods to help prevent muscle loss

## **Fatigue:**

- Choose foods high in protein and calories which provide energy
- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day)
- Consider incorporating nutritional supplement drinks (e.g., Ensure, Boost) if recommended by your healthcare team
- Light exercise can combat fatigue
- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids

## **Taste Alterations:**

- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids (mix water with some juice or add some lemon or lime to make fluids more palatable)
- Practice frequent oral care; before and after meals in addition to morning and night
- Try rinsing with 1-2 oz of baking soda rinse before and after meals (recipe for baking soda rinse: 1 quart water,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon baking soda)
- If experiencing a metallic taste, use plastic silverware instead of metal silverware
- Try sugar free lemon drops, gum, or mints
- Use different seasonings to enhance flavors such as onion, garlic, chili powder, oregano, rosemary, mint, etc.

## **Heartburn/Reflux:**

- Avoid acidic foods (e.g., citrus, tomatoes), high fat and spicy foods
- Avoid caffeine
- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day)

## **Nausea and Vomiting:**

- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day) to avoid having an empty stomach which can make nausea and vomiting worse
- Avoid greasy and spicy foods, and foods with strong odors
- Choose bland foods that are easier to digest
- Try ginger (chews, teas, add ginger root in soups)
- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids and supplement with an oral rehydration formula to replace lost electrolytes
- Choose foods and beverages rich in potassium (e.g., coconut water, bananas, potatoes without skin, fruit juices, fish) to help replenish lost potassium from vomiting

## **Constipation:**

- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids
- If allowed, choose foods rich in dietary fiber such as bran flakes, whole grain breads and crackers, fresh fruits, vegetables, and legumes
- Increased physical activity can stimulate the digestive tract (e.g., walking)

## **Diarrhea:**

- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids and supplement with an oral rehydration formula to replace lost electrolytes
- Avoid caffeine
- Choose foods and beverages rich in potassium to help replenish lost potassium from diarrhea
- Choose foods with pectin and soluble fiber such as oatmeal, bananas, applesauce, peeled white potatoes, pearl barley, and white rice

# Dietary Guidelines after Gastrectomy

**A gastrectomy is the removal of some or all of the stomach that holds the food at the beginning of digestion.** After surgery your stomach will hold much less food and require a modified diet. You may experience symptoms like diarrhea, fullness, and nausea.

## Dietary modifications after surgery will include:



- Decreased portion sizes
- Consuming small frequent meals 5-6 times per day
- Chewing thoroughly and eating slowly
- Following a high protein diet
- Limiting carbohydrates, simple sugars, and sugar alcohols
- Avoiding certain foods that can trigger discomfort (such as high fat and spicy foods, sugary foods, and dairy containing lactose)
- Separating liquids from solid foods, and avoiding carbonated beverages

## Vitamin & Mineral Deficiencies

Nutritional deficiencies can develop after surgery due to the changes in anatomy which alter the natural absorption of nutrients. The most common deficiencies are vitamin B12, folate, zinc, iron, copper, calcium, and vitamin D. Be sure to discuss specific recommendations for supplementation with your registered dietitian or physician.

## Dumping Syndrome

Patients who have received a gastrectomy may experience symptoms of dumping syndrome which is a condition where food is emptied or “dumped” from the stomach into the small intestine too quickly. Dumping Syndrome can be prevented by following the dietary guidelines outlined above and speaking with your health care team.

	Early Dumping Syndrome	Late Dumping Syndrome
Onset After Meal	 10-30 Minutes	 1-3 Hours
Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nausea / Vomiting</li> <li>Diarrhea</li> <li>Gas / Bloating</li> <li>Abdominal Cramping</li> <li>Weakness / Dizziness</li> <li>Cold Sweats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hypoglycemia (low blood sugars)</li> <li>Dizziness</li> <li>Lightheadedness</li> <li>Cold Sweats</li> <li>Rapid or Irregular Heartbeat</li> </ul>
Causes	<p>Consuming large amounts of food can cause your digestive tract to draw fluid from the bloodstream into your stomach and produce excess digestive hormones. The rapid movement of fluid, hormones, and partially digested foods from your stomach into your small intestine can cause the symptoms of early dumping syndrome.</p>	<p>When large amounts of glucose (sugar) from foods and beverages move quickly into the small intestine it causes a rise in your blood glucose level. Your pancreas responds by releasing the hormone insulin to help regulate the rise in blood glucose. Experts believe that the excess digestive hormones in combination with elevated blood glucose levels causes your pancreas to release too much insulin that can cause your blood glucose level to fall too quickly.</p>

**For additional information, recipes and healthy nutrition ideas, visit: [www.GICancersAlliance.org/Gastric-Nutrition](http://www.GICancersAlliance.org/Gastric-Nutrition)**

*All information and tools presented are intended for educational and informational purposes only, and should not be considered a substitute for professional medical expertise. Please seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional before changing or modifying your diet.*

Please visit our gastric (stomach) cancer advocacy partner websites for additional education, support, research and nutrition information.



Debbie's Dream Foundation:  
Curing Stomach Cancer  
[www.DebbiesDream.org](http://www.DebbiesDream.org)



No Stomach For Cancer  
[www.NoStomachForCancer.org](http://www.NoStomachForCancer.org)



Gastric Cancer Foundation  
[www.GastricCancer.org](http://www.GastricCancer.org)



Raymond Foundation  
[www.TheRaymondFoundation.org](http://www.TheRaymondFoundation.org)



GI Cancers Alliance  
[www.GICancersAlliance.org](http://www.GICancersAlliance.org)



Target Cancer Foundation  
[www.TargetCancerFoundation.org](http://www.TargetCancerFoundation.org)



Hope For Stomach Cancer  
[www.StoCan.org](http://www.StoCan.org)



My Gut Feeling – Stomach Cancer  
Foundation of Canada  
[www.MyGutFeeling.ca](http://www.MyGutFeeling.ca)

**The Ruesch Center**  
*for the Cure of Gastrointestinal Cancers*



The Ruesch Center for the Cure  
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[www.Ruesch.Georgetown.edu](http://www.Ruesch.Georgetown.edu)



Global Gastric Cancer Registry

Global Gastric Cancer Registry  
[www.GlobalGastricCancerRegistry.org](http://www.GlobalGastricCancerRegistry.org)

## Research Initiatives:



Esophageal & Stomach  
Cancer Project  
[www.escproject.org](http://www.escproject.org)



Gastric Cancer Registry  
[www.gcregistry.stanford.edu](http://www.gcregistry.stanford.edu)