



A guide to...

Diet and Liver Disease

Patient Information

How to contact us

Nutrition and Dietetics Department
Sycamore House, Watford General Hospital
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
60 Vicarage Road, Hertfordshire WD18 0HB

Tel: 01923 436 236

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email westherts.pals@nhs.net



Author	Diana David
Department	Nutrition and Dietetics
Ratified / Review Date	September 2023 / September 2026
ID Number	34/2218/V1



The liver

The liver is involved in many essential roles in our body, which include:

- Eliminating harmful substances in the blood, such as toxins and drugs
- Storing energy for later use when needed
- Releasing energy when the body needs it rapidly (e.g. during physical activity)
- Helping with digestion – by producing bile, which breaks down nutrients
- Fighting infections and diseases.

When your liver is damaged and not functioning properly, often caused by scarring (also known as cirrhosis), you may have the following symptoms:

- Unintentional weight loss / muscle wasting
- Fatigue
- Jaundice – yellow skin and whites of the eyes
- Accumulation of fluid in the abdomen (known as ascites) and legs (knowns peripheral oedema)
- Itchy skin
- Confusion and mental changes
- Dark urine and/or pale-coloured stools
- Easy bruising and bleeding
- Loss of libido

Liver dysfunction increases your body's requirement for both protein and energy from your diet, hence it is essential for good nutrition to be a part of your treatment journey to manage your symptoms and prevent further complications.

It is advised you:

- Include both protein and carbohydrate (starchy foods) in each of your meals
 - High protein foods: eggs, fresh meat, poultry and fish, pulses such as beans, peas and lentils, nuts and dairy foods like cheddar cheese, yoghurt, and milk
 - Starchy foods: bread, potatoes, rice, cereals, and pasta
- Have regular meals – avoid skipping meals!
- Incorporate snacks in between meals
- Have a 50g carbohydrate snack before you go to bed
- Keep your salt intake to a minimum.

50g carbohydrate snack before bedtime

If your liver is not working properly, your body will break down your muscles for energy when you are asleep as this is the time when your body does not receive food for a long period of time (fasting). Therefore, to prevent this from happening, it is recommended to eat a 50g carbohydrate snack before bedtime. Some examples of 50g carbohydrate snacks include:

- Banana sandwich
- Bowl of cereal and milk
- Two crumpets with butter and jam
- Banana with glass of milk
- Large piece (80g) of flapjack
- Two slices of toast and 300ml of milk

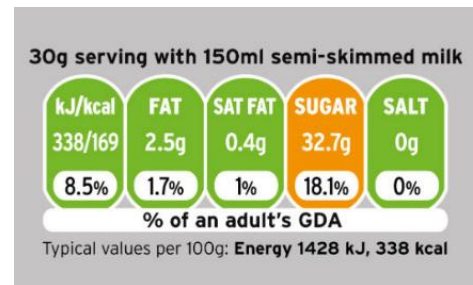
- Scone with butter and jam and a glass of milk
- Muffin and a glass of milk
- A slice of fruit cake and a glass of milk
- Two slices of malt loaf and hot chocolate
- One milk-based supplement (e.g. Ensure Plus Milkshake Style if required) and a biscuit

Management of ascites

Excess salt in the diet can lead to fluid retention. Therefore, it is recommended to reduce salt intake to help limit build-up of fluid in your abdomen (ascites) and legs (peripheral oedema). It is advised to have 80-120mmol/L of sodium (4.6g-6.9g or no more than 1 teaspoon of salt) per day.

There are many ways in which you can reduce your salt intake:

- Watch out for hidden sources of salt which may be indicated by ingredients containing the words 'brine', 'cured', 'smoked', 'monosodium glutamate', 'soda', 'self-raising', 'bicarbonate of soda', Na⁺ (sodium).
- Choose 'No added salt' products.
- Use front-of-pack labels and choose foods that are 'green' for salt.
- Do not add extra salt to the food on your plate.
- Add less salt when you prepare and cook food.
- Try using other flavourings such as fresh or dried garlic, lemon juice, dried and fresh herbs, spices and pepper which you can add freely.
- Limit processed foods – avoid or reduce your consumption of tinned soups, processed meats or fish, crisps, salted snacks (e.g. nuts, savoury biscuits, etc.), bacon and frozen meals
- Choose low-sodium snacks such as unsalted nuts, fresh fruit or yoghurt.
- Rinse tinned foods – if you use tinned vegetables, beans or fish, drain and rinse them under cold water before using to remove some of the salt.
- Limit condiments – condiments such as ketchup, soy sauce and salad dressings can be high in salt; use them sparingly and consider making your own with lower-sodium ingredients.
- Avoid using salt substitutes as they tend to be high in potassium.
- Limit fast food – fast-food items tend to be very high in salt.
- Gradually reduce salt in your food – if you are accustomed to high-salt diet, by reducing your salt intake gradually your taste buds will adjust over time.
- Stay hydrated – drinking water can help flush excess sodium from your body.



Always remember that what you eat will have an important effect on managing your symptoms.

If you need further support, please ask for a referral to dietitian.