

# Low-Fat Diet

*A dietary guide for gallstone disease and chronic pancreatitis*

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## WHY DO I NEED A LOW-FAT DIET?

Your doctor has recommended a low-fat diet to help manage your condition. A low-fat diet is prescribed for:<sup>[1,2,3]</sup>

- **Gallstone disease:** eating fat triggers the gallbladder to contract and release bile, which can cause pain (biliary colic) when gallstones are present. A low-fat diet reduces gallbladder contractions and the frequency and severity of pain episodes.
- **Acute pancreatitis:** during recovery, a low-fat diet reduces the stimulation of the pancreas, allowing it to rest and heal.
- **Chronic pancreatitis:** ongoing pancreatic inflammation reduces the ability to digest fat, causing fat malabsorption (steatorrhoea: loose, oily, foul-smelling stools). A low-fat diet reduces these symptoms.

The target fat intake on a therapeutic low-fat diet is usually 30-40 grams of total fat per day, compared with the typical Australian intake of 70-100 grams per day.

## UNDERSTANDING FAT IN FOOD

Fat is found in foods in different forms. For a low-fat diet, the total amount of fat matters most, regardless of type. However, when fat is allowed, choosing unsaturated fats (from plant sources and fish) over saturated fats (from animal products) supports heart health.

Foods are labelled as follows in Australia:

- "Low fat": 3 grams or less of fat per 100 grams
- "Reduced fat": at least 25% less fat than the regular product
- Always check the Nutrition Information Panel and look at total fat per serving, not just per 100 grams

## FOODS TO CHOOSE

### Protein

- Skinless chicken breast and turkey
- Fish and seafood (steamed, baked, or grilled, not fried)
- Lean cuts of beef or pork with all visible fat removed (e.g. eye fillet, lean mince)
- Eggs (in moderation; the yolk contains fat; egg whites are fat-free)
- Legumes (lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans): excellent low-fat protein sources
- Tofu (firm, low-fat varieties)
- Very low-fat dairy: skim milk, fat-free yogurt, reduced-fat cottage cheese

### Grains and Starches

- White or wholemeal bread (without added fat)
- Plain pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, and quinoa
- Breakfast cereals without added fat or nuts (porridge, cornflakes, weetbix)
- Plain crackers and rice cakes
- Potatoes (boiled, mashed without butter, or baked without oil)

## **Vegetables**

- All vegetables are naturally low in fat; eat freely
- Steam, boil, microwave, or bake without added fat
- Avoid vegetables prepared with butter, oil, cream sauce, or cheese

## **Fruit**

- All fresh fruit is suitable (most fruit contains negligible fat)
- Avoid coconut, avocado, and olives (all high in fat)

## **Condiments and flavourings**

- Herbs and spices (all suitable)
- Lemon juice and vinegar
- Soy sauce, mustard, and fat-free salad dressings
- Fat-free stock and gravy (made without fat)

## **FOODS TO AVOID OR LIMIT**

### **High-fat foods to avoid:**

- Fried foods of any kind (chips, fried chicken, battered fish, spring rolls)
- Full-fat dairy: full-fat milk, cream, butter, cheese, ice cream, and sour cream
- Fatty meats: sausages, bacon, salami, lamb chops, chicken skin, duck, and pork belly
- Pastry, pies, quiches, croissants, and doughnuts
- Cakes, biscuits, chocolate, and most commercial snack foods
- Cooking oils and fats (including olive oil, vegetable oil, and margarine)
- Coconut milk and coconut cream
- Avocado
- Nuts and seeds (all very high in fat)
- Peanut butter and other nut butters
- Regular salad dressings, mayonnaise, and creamy sauces
- Fast food and takeaway meals

### **Alcohol:**

Alcohol should be avoided completely if you have pancreatitis (alcohol is the most common cause of pancreatitis in Australia). For gallstone disease, moderate alcohol restriction is advisable. Follow your doctor's specific guidance.

## **COOKING METHODS**

Choosing the right cooking method significantly reduces the fat content of meals:

- Baking, roasting (on a rack without added fat), grilling, or barbecuing
- Steaming, boiling, and microwaving
- Poaching (in water, stock, or wine without oil)
- Using a non-stick pan with a cooking spray or a very small amount of oil
- Avoiding deep-frying or pan-frying in oil

## **PRACTICAL MEAL IDEAS**

### **Breakfast**

- Porridge made with skim milk, topped with banana and honey

- Weetbix or cornflakes with skim milk
- Wholemeal toast with Vegemite or a scrape of low-fat ricotta
- Fat-free yogurt with fruit

### Lunch

- Sandwich or wrap with skinless chicken, turkey, or tuna, with salad and mustard (no mayonnaise)
- Lentil or vegetable soup with crusty bread (no butter)
- Rice paper rolls with prawns and vegetables
- Pasta with a tomato-based sauce and lean mince

### Dinner

- Grilled fish with steamed vegetables and boiled rice or potato
- Roasted chicken breast (skin removed) with steamed broccoli and sweet potato
- Beef stir-fry with minimal oil, vegetables, and rice
- Chickpea and vegetable curry (without coconut milk) with basmati rice
- Lentil bolognese with pasta

### Snacks

- Fresh fruit
- Fat-free yogurt
- Plain rice cakes or crackers
- Steamed edamame

## READING NUTRITION LABELS

Use the Nutrition Information Panel on food packaging to choose low-fat options. Aim for less than 3 grams of fat per 100 grams as a guide for low-fat products. Check the serving size carefully, as one serving may be much smaller or larger than expected.

### SEE A DIETITIAN

A low-fat diet can be nutritionally restrictive if not planned carefully. An Accredited Practising Dietitian can help you meet your nutritional needs while managing your symptoms. Dietitians Australia can help you find one near you:

[www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au)

## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- **Dietitians Australia:** [www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au) - Find an Accredited Practising Dietitian for personalised low-fat dietary advice
- **Eat for Health (NHMRC):** [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au) - Australian Dietary Guidelines and healthy eating resources

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## REFERENCES

1. Stinton LM, Shaffer EA. (2012). Epidemiology of gallbladder disease: cholelithiasis and cancer. *Gut and Liver*, 6(2), 172-187.
2. Deng G, et al. (2019). Dietary interventions for patients with chronic pancreatitis: systematic review. *Pancreatology*, 19(3), 463-473.

3. Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA). (2023). Gallstone disease and pancreatitis. <https://www.gesa.org.au>
4. Eat for Health (NHMRC). (2023). Australian Dietary Guidelines. <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au>