

WESTERN ZONE OBESITY NETWORK

NOVA SCOTIA

# Nutrition Guide for Bariatric Surgery

*What to eat before and after surgery*

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For patients in the Western Zone Bariatric Surgery Program.

Based on Obesity Canada Clinical Practice Guidelines.

Edited by Kate Wentzell, RD, CBE · Michael Mindrum, MD, FRCPC, ABOM · Victoria Bentley, MD, Bariatric Surgery

Western Zone Obesity Network · Last updated June 2026

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## INTRODUCTION

Bariatric surgery changes how your body digests food and absorbs nutrients. Before surgery, the focus is on building healthy habits that will help you succeed. After surgery, your stomach will be much smaller and your body will absorb fewer nutrients, so eating well, getting enough protein, and taking vitamins become essential. This guide walks you through both.

### Using this guide

- This guide is for patients in the Western Zone Bariatric Surgery Program.
- Always follow the advice of your healthcare team.
- Your dietitian will help adjust these guidelines to fit your needs.

## BEFORE SURGERY

### Building healthy habits

The months before surgery matter. Building good habits now will help you recover faster and succeed long-term. Start practising these as soon as you can.

#### Eating habits to practise

- Eat within 1–1.5 hours of waking up
- Space meals every 4–5 hours
- Eat slowly: take 15–20 minutes for each meal
- Eat protein at every meal and snack
- Stop eating when you feel satisfied, not stuffed

## Drinking habits to practise

- Drink 6–8 cups (1.5–2 litres) of fluid every day
- Make water your main drink
- Wait 30 minutes after eating before you drink
- Avoid alcohol and carbonated (fizzy) drinks

## Other important habits

- Start vitamin and mineral supplements
- Be physically active as much as you can
- Practise separating eating from drinking

### ✓ Tips for behaviour change

- Start with one or two habits that feel doable.
- Once those feel natural, add more.
- Small steps lead to big changes!

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## BALANCED MEALS

### Eating balanced meals

After surgery your meals will be much smaller, so learning to build balanced meals now helps you get the nutrition you need from smaller portions. Think of your plate in sections:

- **Protein first** (largest priority): eat this first at every meal
- **Vegetables** (about half your plate): choose non-starchy vegetables most often
- **Carbohydrate** (small portion): choose whole grains and high-fibre options

- **Healthy fats:** added fats like olive oil, used sparingly

### Examples of balanced meals

- Baked chicken + roasted vegetables + a small serving of brown rice
- Eggs + sautéed vegetables + a slice of whole-grain toast
- Greek yogurt + berries + a small amount of nuts
- Grilled haddock + steamed vegetables + a small serving of potato
- Baked tofu + sautéed vegetables + a small serving of buckwheat noodles

## Foods to limit before surgery

Start cutting back on these now, because they will not fit well after surgery:

- Sugary drinks (pop, fruit juice, sweet coffee drinks)
- Fast food and deep-fried foods
- Candy, pastries, cookies, and baked goods
- Chips and other high-fat snacks

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### YOUR TOP PRIORITY

## Protein

Protein is the most important nutrient after bariatric surgery. It helps your body heal, keeps your muscles strong (you want to lose fat, not muscle), and helps you feel full longer. Most people need **60–100 grams of protein per day** after surgery; your dietitian will give you a specific goal. A general target is 20–30 g at each meal and 5–15 g at each snack.

## Your personal protein target

grams per day

Protein-rich food	Amount	Protein
Meat (beef, pork, chicken)	½ cup (85 g)	25 g
Protein drink, ready-made	325 mL (11 oz)	20–30 g
Protein powder	1 scoop (~30 g)	20–27 g
Fish	½ cup (85 g)	20 g
Greek yogurt	¾ cup	17 g
Cottage cheese	½ cup	15 g
High-protein milk	1 cup (8 oz)	12–18 g
Eggs	2 large	12 g
Firm tofu	½ cup	12 g
Egg whites	⅓ cup	10 g
Beans, peas, lentils	½ cup (cooked)	9 g
Milk or soy milk	1 cup	9 g
Cheese	1 oz (30 g)	7 g

# Vitamins & minerals for life

After bariatric surgery your body absorbs fewer nutrients and your stomach is smaller, so vitamins and minerals must be taken for life to prevent deficiencies. Your dietitian and care team can help you decide which are right for you.

Vitamin / mineral	Why you need it
Multivitamin	Covers many vitamins and minerals your body needs
Vitamin B12	Keeps nerves healthy, prevents anemia
Vitamin D	Keeps bones strong, helps the body absorb calcium
Calcium	Builds and maintains strong bones
Iron (especially for women)	Prevents anemia, carries oxygen in the blood

## Two options for vitamins

### Option A: Bariatric multivitamin

These are made specially for bariatric patients and have higher amounts of key nutrients. Most include B12, iron, and vitamin D already. You still need to take calcium separately. *Examples: Bariatric Advantage, Celebrate Vitamins.*

### Option B: Regular multivitamin + extra supplements

Take a complete adult multivitamin (you may need two per day). Add extra B vitamins, vitamin D, and iron as needed. You still need to take calcium separately.

## A few important tips

- Start taking vitamins when you come home from the hospital
- Chewable or liquid vitamins may be easier for the first 4–8 weeks
- Do **not** use gummy vitamins; they don't have enough nutrients

- Take calcium and iron at different times (at least 2 hours apart)
- Your care team will check your vitamin levels with blood tests

#### VERY IMPORTANT

*After surgery your body absorbs fewer nutrients. Taking vitamin and mineral supplements every day, for life, is not optional. It is essential for your health.*

#### GET READY

## Pre-surgery checklist

Have these items at home before your surgery.

### Vitamins and supplements

- **Bariatric multivitamin** plus calcium citrate, **or**
- **Regular multivitamin** plus calcium citrate, vitamin D, vitamin B12 or B complex
- Others as directed by your care team

### Protein and fluids

- Protein shakes or protein powder
- Low-sugar sports drinks
- Broth (chicken, beef, or vegetable)
- Sugar-free Jell-O
- Greek yogurt (smooth)

### Soft and pureed foods

- Cottage cheese
- Eggs

**C**anned fish (tuna, salmon)

**C**anned fruits (in water)

**F**rozen vegetables

## Kitchen items

**B**lender or food processor

**M**easuring cups and spoons

**S**mall plates, bowls, and cups

### Bring these to hospital on the day of your surgery

- This Nutrition Guide for Bariatric Surgery (to review with a dietitian in hospital)
- An up-to-date medication list
- Arrange a ride home from hospital

## PRE-SURGERY DIET

### Pre-surgery meal replacement: NuvoVi

NuvoVi is a low-calorie meal replacement drink. Before your surgery you will drink NuvoVi shakes for several weeks. This special diet helps reduce the size of your liver, which gives your surgeon more room and helps make surgery easier.

#### Using total meal replacements

- Drink 4 packets per day
- Drink your first packet within 1 hour of waking up
- Mix 1 packet with 300 mL of cold water
- Shake, stir, or blend — drink right away or refrigerate for up to 24 hours

## What else can you have?

In addition to your 4 shakes, drink 6–8 cups (1.5–2 litres) of other fluids:

- Water (you can add lemon or sugar-free water flavourings)
- Decaf coffee or tea (up to ¼ cup skim milk per day)
- Broth (½ to 1 cup per day)
- Sugar-free Jell-O or popsicles

### ⚠ Important rules while on meal replacement

- Tell your care team about any allergies before starting meal replacements.
- Stop your regular multivitamin and any extra vitamin C (the shakes contain vitamins). Continue all other supplements (vitamin D, B12, etc.).
- Stop drinking shakes by midnight the night before surgery.
- You may drink 2 cups of water up to 3 hours before your hospital arrival time.

### ✓ Managing hunger on meal replacements

- Drink shakes at regular times (every 4 hours)
- Increase water intake — ice chips may help
- Consider avoiding sitting with others while they eat
- Use journaling or deep breathing to stay on track
- Keep busy with other activities

Order your NuvoVi shakes as soon as your surgery is scheduled. Your care team will give you a code to order online. Make sure you have enough for the full pre-surgery diet. The cost for two weeks of NuvoVi is around \$200. *For detailed product instructions, see the NuvoVi handout.*

## AFTER SURGERY

# The five stages of eating

After surgery your diet progresses slowly through five stages, giving your stomach time to heal. Some people move through the stages faster or slower, and that's okay. Always follow your care team's guidance.

Stage	When	What you can eat
1. Clear fluids	Days 0–1	Water, broth, sugar-free Jell-O, decaf tea
2. Full fluids	Days 2–7	Protein shakes, blended soups, yogurt, milk
3. Pureed foods	Weeks 2–3	Cottage cheese, scrambled eggs, blended foods
4. Soft foods	Weeks 4–5	Soft meats, fish, mashed vegetables, soft fruits
5. Regular foods	Week 6+	Regular textured foods, as you tolerate

## 9 tips to follow after surgery

1. Eat regularly, every 2–3 hours, even if you are not hungry.
2. Eat slowly and chew foods very well.
3. Take a minimum of 15–20 minutes per meal.
4. Do not drink fluids with meals (drink 30 minutes before or after).
5. Use smaller utensils and plates to help manage portion sizes.
6. Avoid very hot or very cold foods to reduce stomach discomfort.
7. Gradually increase your servings each week.
8. Introduce new foods one at a time to assess tolerance.
9. Avoid carbonated beverages.

### ⚠️ **When to call your team**

Contact your care team if vomiting lasts more than 24 hours. If needed, step back to a liquid diet.

## STAGE 1 • DAYS 0-1

### Clear fluids

This stage helps your stomach heal while keeping you hydrated. You will start with small sips of water in the hospital.

#### ● **What you can have**

- Water
- Clear broth (chicken, beef, or vegetable)
- Decaf tea or coffee (no cream or sugar)
- Sugar-free Jell-O and popsicles
- Sugar-free sports drinks (not carbonated)
- Ensure Clear (juice-based, not milky)

#### ● **What to avoid**

- Carbonated (fizzy) drinks
- Sugary drinks
- Caffeine
- Anything creamy or milky

### ✓ Tips

- Sip fluids slowly.
- Consider using a 30 mL medicine cup to prevent gulping.
- Slowly increase to 60–100 mL of clear fluids per waking hour.
- Use room-temperature liquids to avoid stomach cramps.

## STAGE 2 • DAYS 2–7

### Full fluids

This stage adds nutrition and protein while still being gentle on your stomach. Everything should be smooth and drinkable — no chewing needed.

#### ● What you can have

- Protein shakes (ready-made or homemade)
- Smooth, blended soups (no chunks)
- Smooth Greek yogurt (no chunks or seeds)
- High-protein yogurt drinks
- Milk, soy milk, or protein-fortified plant milk
- Homemade smoothies (no seeds or skins)
- Bone broth

#### ● What to avoid

- Anything with chunks, pieces, or seeds
- Carbonated, caffeinated, or sugary drinks

### ✓ Tips

- Slowly increase fluids to 100–200 mL per hour while awake.
- Drink slowly, in small sips, to avoid nausea or vomiting.
- Aim for 1.5–2.0 L of fluid per day, with at least half containing protein.
- Aim for a minimum of 60 g of protein per day to promote healing.
- Liquid or chewable multivitamins can be started at this stage.

## Example of a full-fluid day

Breakfast	High-protein smoothie
Snack	Protein shake
Lunch	Blended high-protein soup
Snack	Smooth Greek yogurt (or drink)
Dinner	High-protein smoothie or blended soup
Bedtime snack	Glass of high-protein milk

## Full-fluid recipes

### Protein smoothie

- ½ to 1 cup milk or milk alternative
- ¼ cup soft fruit (banana, canned peaches)
- 1 scoop protein powder
- Blend until smooth.

### Protein yogurt drink

- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup milk or milk alternative
- ½ scoop flavoured protein powder
- Mix or blend until smooth.

### Protein soup

- 1 cup smooth or blended soup
- ¼ cup milk or high-protein milk
- ½ scoop unflavoured protein powder
- Mix well. Heat gently. Blend if needed.

### Choosing protein supplements

- At least 15–20 g protein per serving
- Less than 5 g sugar per serving
- Caffeine-free
- If lactose intolerant: choose whey isolate, or soy or pea protein

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#### STAGE 3 • WEEKS 2–3

## Pureed foods

This stage introduces thicker foods while your stomach continues to heal. All foods must be blended smooth — like baby-food texture.

### ● High-protein pureed foods

- Pureed meat or fish (blended with broth or gravy)
- Smooth cottage cheese
- Ricotta cheese
- Smooth Greek yogurt
- Soft scrambled eggs (blend if needed)
- Silken tofu
- Pureed beans or lentils

### ● Include in moderation

- Hot cereal made with high-protein milk
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Pureed cooked vegetables
- Small amount of mashed potato or sweet potato

## ● Avoid

- Anything with chunks or pieces
- Bread, rice, or pasta
- Raw vegetables or fruits
- Seeds, nuts, or skins

## Example of a pureed day

Breakfast	Plain Greek yogurt with 2–4 tbsp unsweetened applesauce
Snack	Protein smoothie
Lunch	Blended high-protein soup
Snack	Cottage cheese (blended until smooth)
Dinner	Pureed fish (thinned with broth) with a small amount of pureed vegetable
Bedtime snack	Protein shake or high-protein milk

### How to make pureed food

1. Cook foods until very tender
2. Put in a blender or food processor
3. Add liquid (milk, broth, gravy, or water) to help blend
4. Blend until completely smooth
5. Add seasonings (pepper, garlic powder, etc.)

**Tip:** Freeze extra portions in cube trays for easy meals or smoothies later.

The amount you eat at a meal should gradually increase to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of food.

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STAGE 4 • WEEKS 4-5

## Soft foods

This stage introduces more texture. Foods should be soft enough to mash with a fork. You no longer need to blend everything.

### ● High-protein soft foods

- Soft, moist meats with sauce or broth
- Fish (including canned tuna or salmon)
- Soft scrambled or boiled eggs
- Tofu
- Well-cooked lentils or beans
- Cottage cheese, ricotta, or other soft cheeses

### ● Include in moderation

- Mashed cooked vegetables
- Small amount of mashed potato, sweet potato, or soft grains
- Soft cooked or canned fruits
- Avocado
- Nut butters (smooth)

### ● Avoid

- Raw vegetables or fruits
- Tough or chewy meats
- Seeds, nuts, or skins
- Bread (often hard to tolerate at this stage)

## Example of a soft-food day

Breakfast

Scrambled eggs (add egg whites for extra protein) with a small amount of soft fruit

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Snack	Protein smoothie
Lunch	Canned tuna with 1–2 crackers and a small amount of cooked vegetables
Snack	Cottage cheese with a small amount of fruit
Dinner	Chicken with sauce or gravy, a small amount of steamed vegetable and mashed potato
Bedtime snack	Greek yogurt with a small amount of blueberries

The amount you eat at a meal should gradually increase to  $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 cup of food.

## STAGE 5 • WEEK 6 AND BEYOND

### Regular foods

You can now eat regular textured foods — but remember, your stomach is still much smaller. This is how you will eat for the rest of your life.

#### Daily eating guidelines

- Eat 3–5 meals per day, plus snacks if needed to meet protein goals
- Eat protein first at every meal
- Include a vegetable or fruit with each meal
- Keep starch portions small
- Introduce new foods one at a time
- Chew all food thoroughly (20–30 chews per bite)
- Eat slowly — take 20–30 minutes for each meal
- Stop eating when you feel satisfied (not full or stuffed)

## Drinking guidelines

- Drink 6–8 cups of fluid per day; water should be your main drink
- Sip throughout the day
- Limit caffeine to 2–3 cups of coffee per day (400 mg max)
- Do **not** drink with meals — wait 30 minutes after eating
- Limit or avoid alcohol — it is absorbed faster after surgery and is high in calories

### **Important**

- Remember, you must take vitamins for life.
- Don't drink liquid with meals.
- Alcohol absorption can be much higher and the risk of addiction increases after surgery. Best practice is to avoid alcohol.

The amount you eat at a meal should gradually increase to 1–1½ cups of food.

# Food choices for life after surgery

## ● Choose most often

- Chicken and turkey
- Lean meats
- Fish and seafood
- Eggs and egg whites
- Greek yogurt and cottage cheese
- Tofu and tempeh
- Low-fat milk and milk alternatives
- Vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned)
- Fruit (fresh, frozen, or canned in water)
- Beans and lentils
- Whole grains in small portions (whole-grain bread, quinoa, brown rice, oats)

## ● Choose less often

- Healthy fats (avocado, oils, seeds, nuts, nut butter)
- Bacon, sausages, and deli meats
- High-fat dairy (cream, whole milk)
- Dried fruits
- White bread, white pasta, white rice
- Stringy vegetables (asparagus, celery, broccoli stems)
- Produce with tough skins (apples, cucumbers)
- Soft lettuce or spinach; tough or dry meats; chewy bread or crust

## ● Avoid or eat rarely

- Sugary drinks (pop, juice, sweet coffee drinks)
- Alcohol
- Fried foods
- Fast food
- Chips and high-fat snacks
- Candy, pastries, and other high-sugar foods

## TROUBLESHOOTING

# Managing common challenges

Symptom	What can help
Nausea or discomfort after eating	Eat smaller amounts, eat more slowly, chew very well, make sure you're drinking enough fluids (but not with meals)
Constipation	Drink more fluids (6–8+ cups daily), eat more fibre, be more active, try a stool softener if needed
Diarrhea	Limit high-sugar and high-fat foods, avoid fluids with meals, limit sugar alcohols and lactose if needed
Vomiting	Chew very well, take smaller bites, eat more slowly, choose moist foods; step back to soft/liquid foods for 1–2 days if needed

## LONG-TERM SUCCESS

# Moving forward with confidence

## Tips for long-term success

- Build meals around protein first
- Keep easy protein foods on hand (canned fish, eggs, Greek yogurt)
- Prepare meals ahead of time when you can
- Use a food-tracking app if helpful (Baritastic, MyFitnessPal)
- Attend all follow-up appointments
- Get blood work done as recommended by your care team

### ✓ Reminders and encouragement

- Weight loss looks different for everyone.
- It may be fast at first, then slow down. Plateaus are normal.
- Don't compare yourself to others — comparison is the thief of joy.
- Focus on building healthy habits without worrying how they affect the scale.
- Recall discussions about “reasonable expectations” for weight loss.
- Focus on the “non-scale victories”: how you feel, how you function, and how your health has improved.

*Focus on how you feel and function — the non-scale victories are the ones that last.*

## RESOURCES

### Resources

#### Bariatric surgery information

**Obesity Canada** — [obesitycanada.ca](http://obesitycanada.ca)

**Ontario Bariatric Network** — [ontariobariatricnetwork.ca](http://ontariobariatricnetwork.ca)

#### Nutrition resources

**Dietitians of Canada** — [dietitians.ca](http://dietitians.ca)

**Unlock Food** — [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca)

**Cookspiration** — [cookspiration.com](http://cookspiration.com) (recipes)

#### Helpful apps

**Baritastic** — designed for bariatric patients

**MyFitnessPal** — food and activity tracking

**Cronometer** — food and activity tracking

## **Physical activity**

**Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines** — [csepguidelines.ca](http://csepguidelines.ca)

### **Acknowledgements & disclaimer**

This guide is based on Obesity Canada guidelines. We have also modified, with permission, aspects of guides printed elsewhere by the Halifax Obesity Network and the Truro Obesity Care team, and we appreciate their generosity. This guide is for patients in the Western Zone Bariatric Surgery Program. Always follow the advice of your healthcare team; your dietitian will help adjust these guidelines to fit your individual needs.