What is a partial small bowel obstruction?

A partial small bowel obstruction happens when your small bowel becomes narrow. This may cause food to become trapped. When your small bowel is blocked, food, drink, gas and waste cannot move through your body the way they should. Also, your small bowel can get pinched or twisted. When this happens, waste can get trapped inside or blood can stop flowing. This can cause mild or severe pain in your gut (abdomen).

What causes an obstruction?

There are many reasons why the small bowel is narrow or gets blocked. A tumor, swelling or scarring from other surgeries can cause a partial small bowel obstruction. It can happen at any age.

You are more likely to have a partial small bowel obstruction if you have had:

- Surgery or radiation therapy in your stomach area
- Some forms of cancer

What are the symptoms of a small bowel obstruction?

- Stomach cramps or pain
- Passing more gas or no gas at all
- Bloating or feeling full quickly
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Bad breath
General guidelines to reduce the risk

To help reduce your risk of small bowel obstructions you can:

- Follow guidelines for healthy eating
- Choose foods that are easier to digest
- Make choices that will give you less gas

Follow guidelines for healthy eating

- Eat small meals and snacks throughout the day. These are easier to digest.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Drink 8 cups (2 litres) of fluid every day.
- If you are losing weight, try to choose high calorie, high protein drinks such as milk and milkshakes.
- Exercise regularly.
- Consider taking a multivitamin or mineral supplement. Ask your registered dietitian or doctor.

Choose foods that are easier to digest

- Choose tender, well-cooked foods with a smooth texture.
- Avoid dried fruit, nuts, popcorn and seeds. Avoid the skins, membranes and seeds of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid foods that are hard, tough or stringy. Choose foods that have a smooth texture. They will they pass through your intestines more easily.
- Avoid foods with more than 2 grams of fibre in each serving. Read food labels and note the serving size.
- Avoid any foods that make your symptoms worse. Each person is different. Pay attention to what foods agree with you and which ones bother you.
Make choices that will give you less gas

- Avoid drinking through a straw.
- Avoid chewing gum.
- Avoid carbonated beverages.
- Avoid vegetables that often cause gas (broccoli, cauliflower, beets, cabbage, brussels sprouts, lettuce, spinach, carrots, parsnips, turnips, cucumbers, zucchini, onions, green peas, radishes, corn).
- Avoid fruits that often cause gas (bananas, apples, grapes, raisins, prunes, melons).

What can I do about constipation?

Eating smooth foods with less fibre may cause you to become constipated. You may also be constipated because of the medicines you are taking and being less active.

You may be constipated if you:

- Have not had a regular bowel movement for 3 or more days
- Belch or pass excess gas
- Have stomach pain or cramps
- Feel full or uncomfortable

If you have small bowel obstruction and are constipated you should **not** add fibre to your diet. Tell your doctor if you feel nauseous, are vomiting or have changes in bowel movements, such as constipation.
What should I eat?

Grain products

Choose:

- White, light rye or pumpernickel bread, bagels, rolls, tortilla and pita
- Plain pancakes, french toast, waffles or crepes made with white flour
- Hamburger or hot dog buns with no sesame seeds or poppy seeds
- Couscous
- Plain muffins, danishes, pastries and tea biscuits made with white flour (with no dried fruit, berries, nuts or seeds)
- White pasta
- White rice
- Egg noodles
- Rice noodles

Avoid:

- Whole wheat, whole grain, multigrain, dark rye or cracked wheat bread, bagels and rolls
- Bread and bagels with nuts, seeds or dried fruit
- Bran muffin
- Cornbread, corn muffin, cornmeal
- Brown rice and pasta
- Wild rice
- Popcorn
- Wheat germ
- Barley, millet
- Kasha, quinoa
- Buckwheat
Cereal

Choose

- Cheerios®, Corn Flakes®
- Honey Grahams®, Rice Krispies®
- Special K®
- Oatmeal
- Cream of wheat
- Cereal with less than 2 grams of fibre per serving

Avoid

- Bran Flakes®, Raisin Bran®
- All Bran®, Bran Buds®
- Fibre One®, Meuslix®
- Grapenuts®, Vector®
- Red River®, Fruit and Fibre®
- Granola cereal

Meat and alternatives

Choose

- Ground, cooked, tender and moist meats (beef, bacon, fish, lamb, ham, pork, organ meats, poultry, seafood)
- Eggs
- Smooth nut butters (peanut, almond, soy)
- Tofu

Avoid

- Meat and poultry that are tough and stringy
- Meat with casings
- Fish with bones
- Crunchy nut butters
- Nuts and seeds
- Canned and dried beans, peas and lentils
Milk products

Choose

- All types of milk
- Soy beverages
- Plain cheese (sliced, cottage, parmesan)
- Smooth yogurt (may contain soft fruit)
- Smooth ice cream and pudding

Avoid

- Yogurt with fruit, seeds or peels, or with granola
- Ice cream and milkshakes made with berries
- Pudding, ice cream and cheese with nuts, seeds, dried fruit or berries

Vegetables

Choose

- Most well-cooked or canned vegetables without skin, seeds and stalks
- Cooked vegetables (asparagus tips, beets, broccoli and cauliflower florets, carrots and parsnips, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes, strained tomato sauce, tomato paste, mashed turnip, rutabagas, yams)
- Strained vegetable juices with no pulp, such as V8®
- Vegetables with skin and seeds removed (cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, zucchini)

Avoid

- Leafy vegetables (brussels sprouts, cabbage, escarole, endive, lettuce, kale, Swiss chard, spinach, okra, parsley, sauerkraut)
- Vegetables with small seeds (cucumbers, zucchini, tomatoes)
- Stringy vegetables (alfalfa or bean sprouts, asparagus stems, broccoli stems, cauliflower stems, bamboo shoots, bok choy, celery, green beans, wax beans, spaghetti squash, rhubarb)
- Vegetables with tough skins or outer coatings (all peppers with skin, corn, eggplant, green peas, pea pods, snow peas, onions, radishes)
Fruit

Choose

- Most canned or cooked fruit **without** skins and seeds
- Peeled, fresh, ripened fruit (apples, applesauce, apricots, nectarines, pears, peaches, plums, bananas, avocado, papaya, melons, citrus fruit sections (flesh only), orange, tangerine, grapefruit)
- Pureed fruits
- Fruit sauces (smooth, no seeds)
- Pulp-free fruit juice

Avoid

- Stringy fruit (coconut, mango, pineapple, strings of bananas)
- Fruit with tough skins (apples with skin, cherries, grapes, nectarines with skin, pears with skin)
- Candied fruit and peels
- Juices with pulp
- Membranes of fruit (oranges, mandarins, grapefruit)
- Seedy fruit (all berries, figs, kiwi, persimmon, pomegranate)
- Dried fruit such as dates, prunes, raisins
- Canned fruit cocktail
- Canned mandarins

Soups

Choose

- Bouillon
- Broth
- Cream soups made with vegetables, noodles, rice or flour

Avoid

- All other soups
Cookies and crackers

Choose
- Plain cookies (Arrowroot® and Social Tea® cookies)
- Plain crackers (soda crackers, melba toast)

Avoid
- Cookies, crackers and baked goods with nuts, seeds or dried fruit
- Whole grain Triscuits® and Wheat Thins®
- Graham crackers

Other foods

Choose
- Honey, jelly, syrup
- Hard candies
- Marshmallows
- Popsicles, sherbets, puddings, custards
- Butter, margarine, oils, mayonnaise, gravy
- Salt, ground pepper, sugar, ground spices and herbs
- Ketchup, mustard, vinegar
- Pretzels, potato chips

Avoid
- Jam with seeds, preserves or marmalade
- Coconut
- Olives, pickles or relish
- Popcorn
- Fizzy beverages
- Whole spices and herbs (cracked pepper, rosemary)
- Candy or chocolate with nuts or fruit
- Dried fruit candies
- Chewing gum
What can I eat on a liquid diet?

If your symptoms are severe or you vomit after eating solid foods, you will be asked to follow a liquid diet. This means that you must avoid all solid foods until your symptoms go away. If you need to follow a liquid diet for more than 5 days, talk to your doctor or a dietitian to make sure you are getting the nutrients you need.

Here are some foods you can eat on a liquid diet.

**Clear fluids**

- All fruit juices
- Carbonated fruit juices
- Clear fluid nutritional supplement
- Iced tea
- Soda pop
- Jell-O®
- Popsicles
- Clear broth, bouillon, consommé
- Coffee, herbal tea
- Clear hard candy

**Full fluids**

- All dairy beverages
- Milk, chocolate milk, buttermilk, goat’s milk, steamed milk, café au lait, plain milkshakes
- Plain or flavored soy drink or shakes
- Plain or flavoured yogurt, puddings, yogurt drinks, eggnog, custard
- Ice-cream, frozen yogurt bars, sherbet, sorbet
- Carnation Instant Breakfast® drink, nutritional supplement drinks
- Ovaltine®, Horlicks®, Postum®, hot chocolate
- Fruit nectars, V8® juice, tomato juice
- Strained cream soups
- Cream of wheat, cream of rice, well-cooked oatmeal
What should I do when going back to my usual foods?

As you start feeling better, you can slowly add foods back into your diet. Follow these tips:

- Add new foods 1 at a time and in small amounts. This can help you figure out which foods agree with you and which foods do not.

- If you have diarrhea, stomach cramps, gas or bloating after you add a new food, avoid that food. Wait a while before trying it again.

Adapted from materials originally produced by:

BC Cancer Agency – Low Fibre Food Choices for Partial Bowel Obstruction
Credit Valley Hospital – Guidelines for Modified Fibre Diet for Partial Bowel Obstruction
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre – Dietary Guidelines for Bowel Narrowing

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