

# Diet and Nutrition for Cholangiocarcinoma Patients



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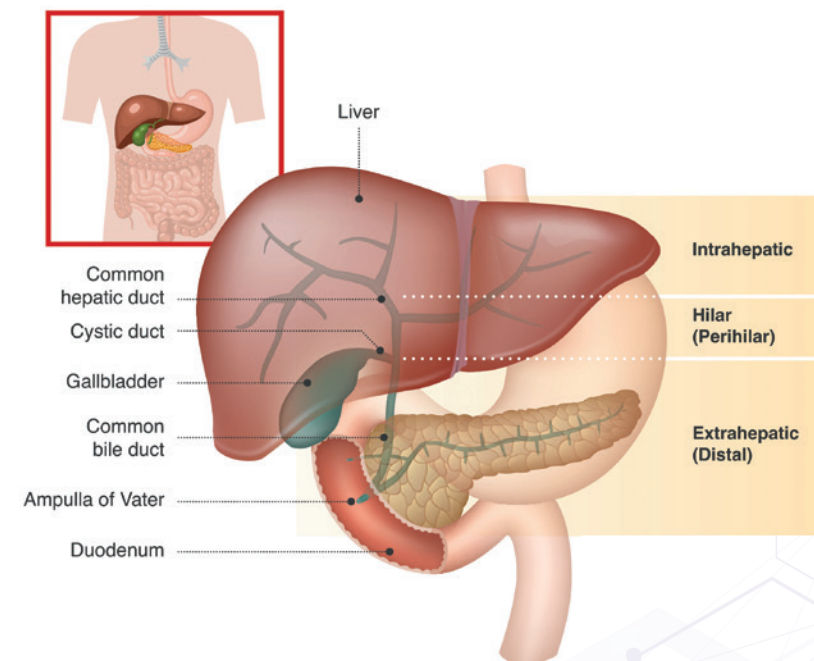
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## What is cholangiocarcinoma?

**Cholangiocarcinoma (CCA)** also known as bile duct cancer, is a primary liver cancer which starts in the inside lining of the ducts of the biliary tree; this is a network of tubes that carry bile from the liver to the gut. Depending on which part of the bile duct CCA develops in, it is categorised as one of three types:

- **Intrahepatic CCA** originates in the bile ducts within the liver
- **Hilar or perihilar CCA** originates just outside the liver, where the left and right hepatic ducts join together
- **Extrahepatic or distal CCA** originates in the common bile duct from just below the cystic duct, which joins the common bile duct and the gall bladder, down to the small intestine. The common bile duct carries bile from the liver and the gall bladder to the small intestine



## Nutritional support in cholangiocarcinoma, why is it important?

For many people, early symptoms of cholangiocarcinoma can include nausea, loss of appetite, weight loss and general tiredness. This can mean your nutritional status may be poor prior to starting treatment.

### Factors that may affect nutritional status –

- Systemic impact of disease:
  - Negative energy balance and muscle loss due to reduced food intake and alterations in metabolism (proteins, fats, carbohydrates)
  - Inadequate nutritional intake
  - Appetite suppression
- Poor appetite, reduced food intake
- Changes to how food tastes
- Gastrointestinal symptoms: nausea, vomiting, early and prolonged “fullness”, diarrhoea, constipation
- Poor absorption of nutrients (malabsorption)
- Dry or sore mouth, mouth ulcers
- Pain
- Fatigue
- Low mood

*Some of these factors may be side effects from the impact of treatment.*

If your nutritional status is impaired, your doctor or dietitian may work with you to improve your nutrition before starting treatment or undergoing surgery, this is called nutritional therapy.

### Goals of nutritional therapy include:

- Optimising your nutritional status to ensure you are healthy enough to begin or continue treatment
- Increasing lean body (muscle) mass and preventing body tissue from breaking down
- Maintaining strength and resilience
- Maintaining your immune system to defend against infection
- Managing the side effects of treatments such as chemotherapy and immunotherapy
- Making sure you continue to enjoy food

People with cholangiocarcinoma may require specialist individualised nutritional management adapted to their specific needs, therefore, if detected, early dietetic intervention and support is important.

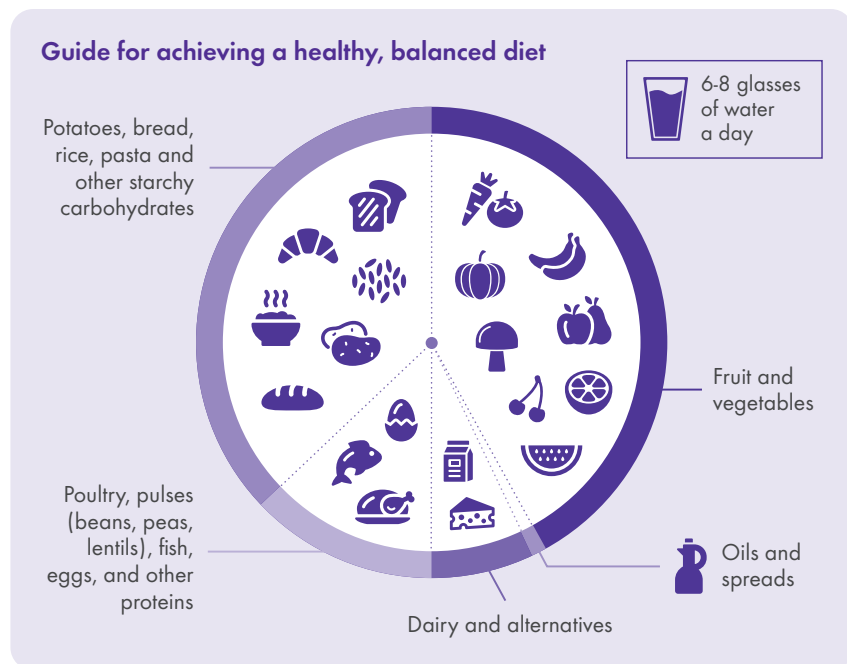


## Healthy eating, why is it important?

Eating a balanced diet is important to ensure you are getting all the nutrients you need from your food.

### Helpful tips for balanced eating

- Try to eat a wide variety of different food types – think different colours, textures and tastes.
- Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Make sure each meal has a good source of protein. This includes poultry (chicken and turkey), pulses (beans, peas, lentils), fish, and dairy sources (milk, yogurt, cheese).
- If you can, try to eat less red and processed meat.
- Focus on starchy carbohydrates such as bread, cereals, rice, pasta and grains but choose wholegrain or high fibre options where possible.
- Aim to reduce fat, salt and sugar.
- Drink plenty of water – aim for around 1.2 litres (6-8 glasses) every day and reduce the amount of carbonated (fizzy) drinks you consume.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.



## Maintaining your weight during treatment

Maintaining your weight and muscle mass is important for people diagnosed with cancer. Being underweight may impact your symptoms or how well you respond to treatment.

As many people with cholangiocarcinoma will experience poor appetite and weight loss, you may need to try and eat extra calories with a high protein and high energy diet to maintain your weight. Here are some practical tips to help:

- Try to avoid larger portions by eating small frequent meals and 3-4 nourishing snacks per day
- Try to eat more on the days when your appetite is good to maximise your nutritional intake
- All foods and drinks consumed should be high in energy and protein
- Always prioritise your protein source first, alongside carbohydrates. Fruit and vegetables are not as important if your appetite is poor, however you should still try to eat them if you can
- If your appetite is poor, always try food first, but speak to your doctor or dietitian if you think fortification or nutritional supplements may be beneficial – these are usually premade milkshakes or yoghurts that are high in calories and protein
- Staying active and practising physical exercise, where possible, will help to maintain your muscle mass and physical fitness

## Coping with the side effects of cholangiocarcinoma and treatments

The following pages describe some of the more common side effects you may experience and some helpful tips on how maintaining a healthy diet can manage these.



### Nausea and vomiting

As part of your treatment you may undergo surgery or radiotherapy or be given different types of medication called chemotherapy, targeted therapy or immunotherapy. Each of these treatments can cause side effects.

- You may find that you feel less sick at certain times of the day, so try to eat at these times if you can.
- Eating dry starchy foods such as toast, crackers or plain biscuits, especially in the morning, can help reduce symptoms of nausea and vomiting.
- Eat small, frequent and regular meals every 2-3 hours.
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, especially if you are vomiting. Fruit juices and soda waters are helpful, and you should sip these through a straw.
- Food and drinks containing ginger and peppermint can help relax the stomach muscles and reduce nausea.
- Wear loose clothing and avoid lying down after eating.

If you are struggling with nausea and vomiting, your doctor may be able to provide you with medication to help. Symptom control is important, and you do not have to wait until you already feel sick to take anti-sickness medication.



### Sore mouth and throat

Certain types of chemotherapy may cause a sore and dry mouth or throat, which can result in ulceration. Some people may also get a mouth infection, known as thrush.

- Manage symptoms with analgesia, soothing or antiseptic mouthwashes or sprays.
- Try to eat cold foods and drinks such as yoghurt, milk and ice cream and chilled nourishing/supplements drinks if you are unable to manage solids.
- Avoid very hot drinks or food – always allow to cool first.
- You should avoid salty, spicy and acidic foods such as crisps, chillies and lemons.
- Avoid dry/rough textured food such as toast, crackers and raw vegetables.
- Introduce soft, moist foods. Add extra liquids to moisten food or soften food by mincing, liquidising and mashing. If you are struggling, talk to your doctor to request a referral to a dietitian for advice on a soft or pureed diet.



### Changes in taste

Your treatment can change the way that some foods taste to you, they may taste metallic, bitter or bland.

If you are having taste changes, try these tips for making food taste more palatable.

- Prepare foods that look and smell appetising, for example colourful fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid foods that have lost their taste or appeal for a few weeks before trying them again to see if your taste has returned to normal.
- Experiment with different flavours, textures and temperatures – cold foods.
- Try adding herbs and seasonings to food, such as lemon juice, garlic, paprika and ginger.



### Changes in taste (continued)

- If food tastes bitter, avoid any artificial sweeteners.
- If food tastes sweeter than normal, try adding sour or salty flavours to counteract the sweetness, such as lemon/lime juices\*, soy sauce\* and vinegar.
- If food has a metallic taste, try marinating meat with fruit juices or sweet marinades. You could add pickles or chutneys to your meal or try sharp flavours such as lemon juice\*, pineapples\* and boiled sweets.

*\*Avoid if suffering with sore mouth and/or throat.*



### Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea can be a symptom of your cancer, or the treatment you are taking. If you are experiencing severe diarrhoea, please speak to your doctor as they may be able to provide medication to help.

If you are experiencing diarrhoea, please use these tips to help avoid and manage your symptoms.

- Avoid high fibre foods such as wholegrain bread, cereals and fibrous vegetables such as raw vegetables and fruit skins.
- Avoid fatty and spicy foods.
- Avoid caffeine and try herbal teas instead to help soothe symptoms.
- Adjust your dairy intake such as yoghurt, milk and cheese as your body will have reduced ability to digest lactose.
- Avoid gas-producing foods like beans, fizzy drinks, cabbage and Brussels sprouts.
- Make sure you are drinking plenty of fluids to replace those lost during the day. As well as water, try to drink fruit juices, sports drinks or herbal teas to replace salts and sugars that have also been lost.



### Fatigue

Feeling tired, also known as fatigue, is a common side effect of many cancer treatments. For many people, feelings of tiredness worsen the longer they are on treatment and can continue for many weeks.

Eating a balanced diet should help you reduce these feelings of tiredness. However, there are other practical things you can do, such as:

- Keeping your cupboards well stocked with easy to prepare foods such as tinned foods.
- Using an online food shopping delivery service.
- Try to plan ahead. On days you are feeling more active, prepare extra meals and freeze them for a later date.
- Allow family and friends to help do the shopping and cook for you.
- If you feel very fatigued, try a nourishing drink such as a smoothie, a milky hot drink with fortified milk or a supplement drink/pudding.
- If you are struggling, your GP may be able to arrange meal delivery or home help for assistance with meal preparation.

## Nutritional considerations following surgery

If your cholangiocarcinoma can be operated on and removed, you may experience long-term side effects from the surgery. These side effects may need to be managed differently to those associated with chemotherapy or other treatments.

Recovery time following surgery will vary for each individual depending on the type and extent of their surgery and general level of fitness before their operation. Most people will need to stay in hospital for several weeks so that doctors can make sure they recover as expected.

Following surgery your bowels may not work as they normally would, and you may find eating and drinking difficult. Your doctor will be used to managing this and will help you to gradually reintroduce water, followed by small and frequent meals.

It is normal to experience some pain following surgery and your doctor or nurse will be able to give you medications to manage this if needed. Getting up and moving once it is safe to do so can help to speed up your recovery.

The following pages provide more information on the nutritional considerations for people who have had surgery for their cholangiocarcinoma.

## Whipple procedure

Some people who have cholangiocarcinoma will have a type of operation commonly called a Whipple procedure (pancreaticoduodenectomy). The purpose of this surgery is to remove the tumour, but surgeons may need to remove other healthy parts of the body (organs) that are located nearby. This includes parts of your pancreas, gallbladder, bile ducts and intestines.

After performing the Whipple procedure, the surgeon will reconnect the remaining organs to allow you to digest food after surgery, but the procedure can have a long-term effect on your nutrition. Some of the symptoms you may feel include poor appetite, feeling sick, feeling full when not eating enough (early or prolonged satiety), bloating, cramping and wind, weight loss (even when eating enough), diarrhoea or fatty/oily stools.

If you have had surgery, your doctor may recommend that you receive pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT). This medication would replace the enzymes that your pancreas would normally make. These enzymes help you to digest your food by breaking down carbohydrates, fats and proteins in your food. PERT is also important for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, K and minerals Selenium, Zinc and Copper.

Your doctor or dietitian will provide you with more information on this.

## Bile acid malabsorption (BAM)

Bile acid is a substance produced in your liver, which is released into the small intestine when food is eaten to help digestion. In some people who have had surgery as part of their treatment, bile acid is not reabsorbed properly back into the blood, causing a condition called bile acid malabsorption (BAM), which can lead to a number of symptoms –

- Weight loss
- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Cramping
- Excessive wind

Maintaining a reduced fat diet can help to improve the symptoms of BAM. Avoiding fried foods, full fat dairy, cheese and oils, and using low fat or 0% fat alternatives will be beneficial. If this is severe, there are medications available that you should discuss with your doctor.

If you have BAM, you should work closely with your doctor and dietitian to cope with your symptoms and treatment plan.

## Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)

Changes in your small intestine from surgery may cause your natural gut bacteria to grow abnormally or to unusually high levels. This can lead to significant symptoms, such as bloating, excessive wind, diarrhoea, weight loss, nutritional deficiencies, and osteoporosis (weak bones).

Depending on the type of bacteria growing, treatment usually involves a course of antibiotics and supplements to return nutrients in your body back to their normal levels. Studies have shown that probiotics may be both help and hindrance for SIBO. Ultimately, there is no convincing evidence that probiotics eradicate SIBO, but antibiotics can, and they remain the most effective way to treat it.<sup>1</sup>

You may also be advised to follow a specific diet called the low-FODMAP diet. Your doctor or dietitian will be able to provide you with more information on this.

<sup>1</sup> [www.thefunctionalgutclinic.com](http://www.thefunctionalgutclinic.com)

## Dietary supplements

### Food supplements

Food supplements come as tablets, capsules, powders and tonics. They include vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins and plant extracts.

You may be at risk of developing a lack of (deficiencies in) vitamins and minerals if you have:

- not eaten well for a long time
- had surgery to your digestive system

Your oncologist can prescribe vitamins and minerals. If you are not able to eat a healthy balanced diet, your doctor may prescribe a multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement to take every day. This will give you the full amount of the nutrients you need. This is called the Nutrient Reference Value (NRV).

Nutrients are essential for our health, in small amounts. But they can be harmful and cause unpleasant side effects when taken in large amounts. Some may affect cancer treatments or make them less effective.

### Antioxidant food supplements

Antioxidants are some of the most common dietary supplements. They can help to prevent cell damage. They include:

- vitamins A, C and E
- coenzyme Q10
- selenium
- some plant extracts

If you are thinking of taking food supplements, it is important to talk to your cancer doctor or specialist nurse first.

Despite a lot of research into cancer and food supplements, there is no good evidence to suggest that taking them can help treat cancer or stop it from coming back. But research has found that taking certain supplements could increase the risk of some cancers developing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)





# AMMF – The UK’s only cholangiocarcinoma charity

Working throughout the UK  
and Europe, collaborating  
throughout the world for those  
with cholangiocarcinoma



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Tel: +44 (0)1279 661479 Email: [info@ammf.org.uk](mailto:info@ammf.org.uk)

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