

What is a GI gentle diet?

The severity of gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms - like nausea, heartburn, stomach pain, early satiety (feeling full before you eat a full meal), and indigestion - varies from person to person. What you eat and how you eat can influence your symptoms. A **GI gentle diet** is a plan that helps reduce common GI symptoms. It includes paying attention to how much fat and fiber you eat, as well as your meal sizes and timing.

This handout provides different diet changes you can make to help manage your symptoms and make sure you are receiving all the nutrients your body needs. Keep in mind your symptoms may be different from week-to-week, or even day-to-day. During a “flare up” of symptoms, you may experience a period of time where all you can take is liquids. It is important to find what works best for you, based on your body’s needs at any one time.

What are the general nutrition recommendations for a GI gentle diet?

- ✓ **Pay attention to your portion sizes.**
 - Avoid eating large meals, as they will take longer to empty from your stomach and can increase your symptoms.
 - Based on your portion sizes and calorie needs, you may need to eat 4-5 smaller meals per day. A small meal is about **1-1½ cups** of food (you may need to adjust the size of the meal and timing based on your specific tolerance). Eating smaller, more frequent meals can help you feel better and also help you get enough nutrients throughout the day.
 - Avoid constantly snacking (“grazing”), and give yourself time to digest your food. Grazing all day can lead to overeating and reduce

your appetite. Try spacing meals and snacks out by at least 3 hours.

✓ **Consider liquid meals as needed.**

- When solid foods are not going well, it may be necessary to change to an all liquid or mostly liquid diet. You can try oral supplements, homemade shakes and smoothies, protein powders, fruit juices, soups, broths, popsicles, milk and plant-based milks, pureed food (blended into liquid form), food pouches, pudding, and yogurt.
 - Some examples of oral supplements include BOOST® Simply Complete, Ensure® Original, Plus, or Clear, Orgain®, and Carnation Breakfast Essentials®.
- Most foods can be pureed in a blender. This will make it softer and easier to digest. You can thin out foods like mashed potatoes and Cream of Wheat® or Cream of Rice® with liquids like milk.
- You may find that your body tolerates solid foods better earlier in the day. If so, try having soft foods or a shake or smoothie later in the day.
 - However, if you experience nausea early in the day, you may find that liquids or soft foods work best to get your day started.

✓ **Include fat in moderation in your diet.**

- High-fat meals take longer to empty from the stomach than low-fat meals, and it may make your symptoms worse.
- Important: A lower fat diet does not mean you need to eat a fat-free diet. In general, our bodies can tolerate 40-50 grams of fat per day fairly well. Like all guidelines, this varies from person to person.

- Good fat sources include olive oil, Earth Balance®, creamy nut and seed butters, avocado, whole eggs, fatty fish, and full fat dairy products.
 - Liquid beverages with fat are easier for your body to tolerate than solid fats. Some good examples are 2% or whole milk, soy milk, oat milk, or oral supplements.
 - Avoid fried foods and high-fat meats such as bacon, hot dogs, salami, bologna, and sausage.
 - Spread your fat intake throughout the day by having a small amount at all meals and snacks.
- ✓ **Reduce high-fiber foods (as needed).**
- High-fiber foods can increase the time it takes to empty the stomach.
 - Fiber is found in beans and peas, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds.
 - To make fruits and vegetables easier to tolerate, you can:
 - Peel off thick skins
 - Cook vegetables (and fruit, if needed) until they are fork tender (soft enough for a fork to easily slice through them). The softer they are, the easier it will be to digest them.
 - Try canned vegetables and fruits, along with fruit and vegetable squeeze pouches.
 - Limit fruit and vegetables to ½ cup per meal or snack (you can increase this portion as your body tolerates it).
 - Blend fruits and vegetables into a smoothie.
 - Select creamy nut butters instead of crunchy.
 - Choose whole grains that are easier to digest, like instant oats and Cheerios™ (instead of steel-cut oats or Kashi® cereal).

- ✓ **Fill up on nutritious foods first.**
 - Eat foods with good nutritional value first before filling up on things like candy, soda, chips, etc.
 - For a well-balanced meal, include a carbohydrate, a protein, and a small amount of healthy fat. Examples of each type of food are listed later in this handout.

- ✓ **Chew your food well.**
 - Digestion starts in the mouth. Chewing your food well reduces the amount of work your stomach has to do.

- ✓ **Stay hydrated.**
 - Drink enough fluids during the day to meet your hydration needs. If you've been vomiting, sip on Pedialyte[®], DripDrop[®], Liquid I.V.[®], or Gatorade[®] to replace electrolytes in your body.
 - Don't drink too much during a meal, as this may fill up your stomach too quickly. Limit yourself to ½ cup (4 ounces) of fluids with meals, and then wait 30 minutes after eating before you continue drinking.

What are some lifestyle and kitchen tips to support a GI gentle diet?

- A blender and crockpot are helpful kitchen appliances you can use to make GI gentle meals, such as soups, shakes, smoothies, tender-cooked meats, fruits, and vegetables.
- Use measuring cups to help you measure portion sizes if needed.
- Use oral supplements or homemade shakes in your diet as needed to reduce your symptoms and get enough calories.
- Try using ginger in your diet to help with nausea. This may include ginger tea, ginger chews (like Gin-Gins[®]), fresh ginger added to smoothies, or cooking with powdered or fresh ginger.

- Avoid laying down for 3 hours after eating. Gravity helps your stomach empty, so we recommend sitting or standing upright after eating.
- Try light walking for 15-30 minutes after a meal to help your stomach with digestion.

What are some food recommendations for a GI gentle diet?

Recommended grains and starches

- **Breads:** White bread and “light” whole wheat bread (no nuts, seeds, etc.), French and Italian bread, bagels (plain), English muffins, plain rolls, pita bread, tortillas (flour or corn), pancakes, waffles, naan, and flat bread
- **Cereals:** Quick oats (plain), grits, Cream of Wheat®, Cream of Rice®, puffed wheat, corn, and rice cereals like Cheerios™, Kix™, Corn/Rice Chex™, Rice Krispies®, Fruit Loops®, Special K®, and Corn Flakes®
- **Grains and potatoes:** White rice, pasta, bulgur wheat (couscous), barley, sweet and white potatoes (peeled, with no skins), yams (peeled with no skins), canned potatoes, and baked French fries
- **Crackers and chips:** Breadsticks, graham crackers, matzoh, melba toast, oyster crackers, pretzels, saltines, soda crackers, water crackers, and baked potato chips

Recommended fruits and vegetables

All fruits and vegetables should have thick skins removed. Vegetables should be cooked to fork-tender or mashable softness, and blended or strained if necessary.

- **Fruits:** Applesauce, bananas, cantaloupe, fruit squeeze pouches, honeydew melon, kiwi (peeled), mandarin oranges (canned), oranges (peeled), peaches (canned), pears (canned), strained pureed fruits, 100% fruit juices, and watermelon

- **Vegetables:** Beets, broccoli (just the green tops and not the stems), carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, mushrooms, spinach, squash, strained pureed vegetables, roasted red peppers, tomato sauce, tomato juice, tomato paste or purée, vegetable juice, and zucchini

Recommended protein sources

Meats should be cooked until tender, ground, shredded, or pureed as needed.

- **Beef:** Tenderloin, sirloin, round (bottom or top), ground lean beef (more than 90% lean), and strained pureed meats
- **Pork:** Tenderloin, pork chops (trim off the extra fat), and shredded crockpot pork
- **Poultry** (without the skin): Chicken, turkey, and ground turkey (more than 90% lean)
- **Eggs:** If whole eggs don't work for you, try egg whites or egg substitutes which are lower in fat
- **Wild game** (no skin): Venison
- **Fish and shellfish** (fresh or frozen, plain, with no breading): Salmon, crab, lobster, shrimp, clams, scallops, oysters, and tuna (in water)
- **Dairy:** Cottage cheese, Greek yogurt, milk (if you're lactose intolerant, use lactose-free products), grated parmesan, cheese (1 ounce portion), and kefir
- **Plant-based protein:** Tofu, smooth nut or seed butters (peanut, almond, cashew, or sunflower butter in 1-2 tablespoon portions), soy milk, pea protein milk, and PB2® (low fat peanut butter powder)
- **Protein powders:** Whey, egg white, brown rice, pea, and hemp

Recommended soups and drinks

- **Soups:** Broth-based, bouillon, and strained creamed soups (with milk or water)

- **Drinks:** Hot cocoa (made with water or milk), sports drinks like BodyArmor® or Gatorade®, coffee and coffee drinks, tea, 100% fruit and vegetable juices, dairy or plant-based milk (almond, soy, rice, pea protein, cashew), shakes, smoothies, and oral supplements

What are some sample meals for a GI friendly diet?

A meal pattern of 3 meals and 1-2 snacks during the day works well. A sample meal pattern for one day is below, along with other ideas for different mealtimes and snacks.

One Day Sample Menu:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast: Egg white omelet with spinach, 1 ounce (oz) low-fat cheese, white toast with fruit jam, 4 oz 100% orange juice or V8 Splash® • Snack: Saltine crackers and 1 tablespoon creamy peanut butter • Lunch: ¾-1 cup pureed or creamed soup, ½ cup canned fruit or applesauce, 4 oz water, milk, or juice • Snack: Oral supplement or 6 oz homemade smoothie or Greek yogurt • Dinner: Baked or broiled lean skinless chicken breast, mashed potatoes, cooked carrots, 4 oz drink of choice

Breakfasts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 eggs (or egg whites only) and white toast with low sugar fruit spread • 2-egg omelet with tomatoes, spinach, and cheese and hash browns or peeled roasted potatoes • Cereal (Rice Krispies®, Corn Flakes®, Corn or Rice Chex™, or Cheerios™) with dairy, soy, or almond milk and ½-1 banana • Cream of Wheat or Rice® cereal with 1 teaspoon (tsp) brown sugar and cinnamon and 1 tablespoon (tbsp) nut butter • White bread toasted with 1-2 tbsp peanut or almond butter

Breakfasts:

- Light fat or fat-free Greek yogurt and ½ cup blueberries
- Pancakes or waffles with sugar-free syrup
- French toast made with white bread with sugar-free syrup
- Smoothie made with plain Greek yogurt, ½ banana, ½ cup frozen strawberries, and added water or milk

Lunches and Dinners:

- Sandwich on white bread with lean turkey, hard cheese, lettuce, tomato, and light mayonnaise or mustard
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwich on white bread
- Soup with saltine crackers
- Quesadilla with chicken, cheese, salsa, and 2 tbsp avocado
- Tossed salad with spring mix baby lettuce, lean protein (like chicken, tuna, or tofu), peeled cucumber, tomato, feta, and dressing
- Chicken sautéed with chopped and well-cooked zucchini, carrots, red bell pepper, broccoli bits, and onion, with white rice, soy sauce, and grated ginger
- Baked chicken breast without the skin, ½ baked potato (no skin), and ½ cup cooked carrots or pureed vegetable
- Mac and cheese, sautéed spinach and ½ cup fruit cocktail
- Slow cooker pulled pork or shredded chicken and ½ cup sweet potato (no skin)
- White meat turkey with low-fat gravy and ½ cup mashed potatoes
- White pasta, over 95% lean ground beef, turkey, or plant-based crumbles, red sauce, and parmesan cheese
- Grilled salmon or white fish with lemon, ½ baked potato (no skin) or white rice, and ½ cup steamed broccoli (tops only – avoid the stems)
- Sushi (salmon avocado, tuna, etc. - no raw vegetables) and soy sauce

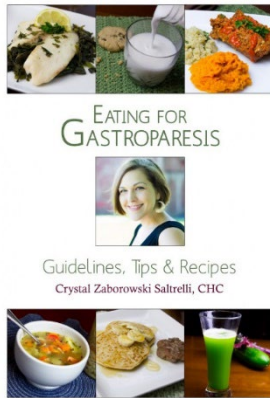
Snacks:

- Banana with 1 tbsp peanut butter
- Light or fat-free Greek yogurt
- 1-2 tbsp hummus with pita bread
- Low-fat cottage cheese with canned peaches or pineapple (packed with water or juice)
- Low-fat cheese stick or 1 oz slice of cheese
- Unsweetened applesauce topped with cinnamon
- Hardboiled egg
- Low sodium V8® juice, Naked® juice, or Bolthouse Farms™ juice
- ½ cup fruit, such as cantaloupe, blueberries, strawberries, papaya, grapes, or well-peeled orange
- Baked or popped potato chips
- Rice cakes or saltine crackers with low-fat cheese or peanut butter
- Pretzels and hummus or creamy nut or seed butter
- Pudding cup
- 1-2 small cookies
- Dry cereal (3 g fiber or less per serving)
- Homemade blueberry or banana muffin
- Homemade smoothie
- Protein powder mixed with your milk of choice
- Ready-to-drink nutritional shakes like BOOST®, Ensure®, or Orgain®

Where can I find resources for more information on GI gentle diets?

- Check out the University of Michigan GI Dietitian Pinterest board online for recommended food and drink products:
pinterest.com/UMGIDietitians/low-fiber-low-residue-products

- Check out the book “Eating for Gastroparesis” and online website created by Crystal Saltrelli, CHC for recipes and tips for managing gastroparesis: LivingWellWithGastroparesis.com



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