

Nutrition Guidelines for Patients with Short Bowel Syndrome

Short bowel syndrome (SBS) is when your bowel can't absorb enough nutrients because part of your small intestine is missing. This may be caused by the length or function.

Symptoms of SBS include:

- Gas
- Cramps
- Diarrhea
- Fluid loss
- Weight loss

Your bowel has two main parts: the large intestine (colon) and the small intestine (small bowel). The small bowel is divided into three parts. Each of these parts has a special job in helping your body absorb nutrients. The three parts include:

- **Duodenum:** This is the first part, right after the stomach.
- **Jejunum:** This is the middle part, after the duodenum.
- **Ileum:** This is the last part, after the jejunum.

Your shortened bowel will absorb more fluids and nutrients over time. This starts about 24-48 hours after the loss of the bowel and will increase within the first 2 years. During this time, it is common to have diarrhea.

Tips to Help Your Body Absorb More Nutrients

Below are tips to help your body absorb more nutrients to prevent SBS.

1. **Eat 5 to 6 small meals a day.** Eating small meals will put less stress on your shortened bowel. Small meals help control your symptoms and will help you digest and absorb nutrients. Eat slowly and chew your food well. You may

resume having 3 meals a day once your bowel adapts. Some patients find that eating smaller, more frequent meals works better in the longer term.

2. **Select high protein foods.** Eat foods high in protein at least 6 times per day. This includes meat, fish, poultry, eggs, legumes, and dairy, if you can handle it.
3. **Limit your fats.** If you have foul-smelling stools that appear oily and or frothy, decrease the amount of fat in your diet. High fat foods include fried foods, oils, butter, margarine, avocado, nuts, high fat chips and crackers, and cookies.
4. **Choose complex carbohydrates.** Good choices are complex carbohydrates. These are found in bread, cereal, pasta, potatoes, and rice. Poor choices are foods rich in simple sugars. This includes regular soda, candies, frozen desserts, sugary cereals, fruit snacks, and fruit juice.
5. **Include soluble fiber into your diet.** Soluble fiber may help slow movement through the bowels and result in a more formed stool. Examples would include Metamucil®, Benefiber® or guar gum, pectin, or foods such as oatmeal, oat bran, barley, and legumes.
6. **You may need to limit insoluble fibers.** Insoluble fibers hold more fluid in the bowel and can increase diarrhea. Examples of these fibers include bran from grains, woody vegetable stems, fruit and vegetable skins, and seeds.

7. **Cut down on how much oxalate you consume.** Oxalate is an organic acid that is found in many foods and made by our bodies when breaking down some foods. Patients sometimes absorb too much oxalate after their ileum is removed. This could lead to too much oxalate in the urine which may form kidney stones. To reduce the amount of oxalate absorbed:

- Have calcium-rich foods at each meal and snack. Calcium binds to oxalate and helps it to be removed from the body.
- Consume probiotic foods like kefir and yogurt with “live active cultures.” These foods help break down oxalate and remove it.
- Eat many types of fruits and vegetables, as tolerated. These provide fuel for good bacteria (probiotics) in your gut, which break down oxalate.

You may need to lower your oxalate intake if you have high urinary oxalate and if increased calcium intake is not taking care of it. Your registered dietitian can help you create a meal plan.

8. **Limit fluids at mealtimes and avoid high-sugar drinks.** Drink ½ cup (4 ounces) of fluid with each meal. Drinking too much during meals makes food move through your body too fast, so you don’t absorb all the nutrients. **Avoid** caffeine, alcohol **or** drinks with a lot of sugar (fruit juice or soda).
9. **Avoid dairy products if they cause gas, bloating, or diarrhea.** Try lactose-free options if needed.

10. **Sport drinks can help you replace lost fluids and important minerals if you have frequent stools.** Try store-bought options like Pedialyte®, Gatorlyte®, LiquidIV®, Drip Drop®, or make your own. Below are recipes that will help maintain fluids.

- **Solution No. 1**

- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon salt substitute
- 8 teaspoons sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 liter of water

- **Solution No. 2**

- 1 cup of orange juice
- 8 teaspoons sugar
- 3/4 teaspoons of baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 liter of water

11. **Avoid nutrition drinks (Ensure®) if you have high ostomy output.** They have too much sugar. Gatorade® and juice can be too sugary alone. Try the recipes below.

- **Ensure Plus® Improved**

- 1 ounce Ensure Plus®
- 8 ounces 2% milk

- **Gatorade 2® Improved**

- 4 cups Gatorade G2®
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

- **Apple Juice Improved**

- 1 cup of apple juice
- 3 cups of water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

- **Cranberry/Grape Juice Improved**

- 1/2 cup juice
- 3 ½ cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

12. Add foods that help thicken stool.

These include:

- No sugar added applesauce
- Bananas
- Cheese
- Cream of rice
- Mashed potatoes
- Peanut butter (creamy)
- Rice
- Soda crackers
- Tapioca
- Weak tea

13. Take all medicines as directed by your doctor. If you have high ostomy output, your provider may prescribe medicine to help slow it down. If you are not currently taking these medicines and are having high output, talk with your doctor if you should start or adjust your medicine.

- **Antidiarrheals** (take 30 minutes before eating):
 - Imodium[®] (loperamide)
 - Lomotil[®] (diphenoxylate)
- **Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPI):**
 - Nexium[®] (esomeprazole)
 - Protonix[®] (pantoprazole)
 - Prilosec[®] (omeprazole)
 - Prevacid[®] (lansoprazole)
- **Histamine2-Receptor Antagonists:**
 - Cimetidine (Tagamet[®])
 - Famotidine (Pepcid[®])
 - Ranitidine (Zantac[®])

14. Take vitamins, minerals, and supplements as recommended:

- Take a daily liquid or chewable multivitamin with iron.
- Take a 500mg calcium supplement (calcium citrate or Tums[®]) three times daily, for a total of 1500mg per day.
- If the last part of your ileum has been removed, you may need vitamin B12 injections.
- If you are having frequent diarrhea, your doctor may prescribe a zinc supplement.
- Keep a saltshaker at the table and use it to help maintain sodium levels.

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright 4/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#369.