



Diet and Liver Cirrhosis

A patient's guide

People with liver cirrhosis need **more energy and protein** than those with a healthy liver. This is because their body has difficulty absorbing, digesting and storing carbohydrates (the body's main source of energy) effectively and as a result uses its protein stores (muscles) as a source of energy.

Some people with liver cirrhosis may develop fluid retention (ascites or oedema), jaundice (yellow discolouration of the skin and eyes) and confusion (encephalopathy). When these symptoms occur it may be that your liver is no longer working well enough to perform its main functions. People who develop these symptoms require specialist dietetic advice. Please ask your doctor.

What foods should I eat?

- **Carbohydrates** should form the basis of the diet and be eaten at each meal. For example bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and cereal. Choose wholegrain or high fibre options.
- **Protein** helps make collagen and new tissue. Aim to have three to four portions each day. For example, meat, fish, beans, pulses, eggs, dairy, soy.
- **Vitamins and minerals** help provide immunity to infection, are involved in blood clotting, skin repair. These are found in fruits and vegetables. Aim to have five portions each day. These can be fresh, frozen, dried or canned.
- **Fat** is needed in small amounts to help protect and insulate the body. Fat is a source of essential fatty acids, which the body cannot make itself and helps the body absorb fat-soluble vitamins A, D and E. Examples of foods high in fat include butter, ghee, lard, cheese, oils, processed meats/cakes and biscuits.

Top tips

- Aim to have **4 – 6 smaller meals** throughout the day rather than three main meals. This will help spread out your energy and protein intake throughout the day.
- Have a **50g carbohydrate snack** before bed – see overleaf.
- If you have a small appetite try to eat **small amounts high energy and high protein snacks**, such as full fat yoghurt, cheese and biscuits, peanuts, milky drinks, dairy-based puddings.
- If you find drinking easier try to have **nutritious drinks** such as hot chocolate, full fat milk, Horlicks, homemade milkshakes (made with ice cream/full fat yoghurt/cream).
- If you feel that you are struggling with your oral intake ask your doctor for a **referral to see a dietitian**. You may require oral nutritional supplements to help ensure that you are meeting your nutritional requirements



Bedtime snack

Before bed your body needs a **50g carbohydrate snack**. This gives your body the energy it needs overnight and reduces muscle loss, wastage and fatigue.

The following snacks all contain approximately 50g carbohydrate:

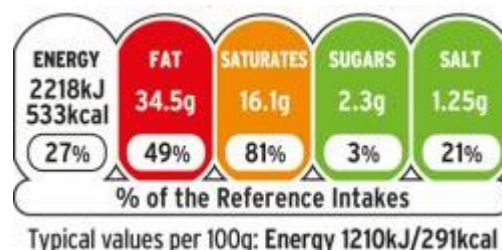
- 300ml milk and 3 plain or chocolate biscuits
- 5 plain or chocolate biscuits
- 2 thick slices toast with jam
- 40g cereal with 100ml milk and chopped banana
- 1 large pitta bread with 50g hummous
- Ensure compact with 2x biscuits
- Ensure Plus Juice



Low salt diet and fluid retention (ascites or oedema)

If you develop fluid retention (ascites or oedema) your doctor may advise you to follow a **low salt diet** as this can help control this.

- Aim to avoid adding additional salt to your food, both when cooking and at the table.
- Try alternative flavourings, such as fresh or dried herbs and spices.
- Be aware that processed foods typically have a higher salt. Aim to reduce your intake of these products, however if buying these foods read the label and aim for lower salt options. Look for the 'green label' when reading traffic light labelling (see picture below).
- Avoid salt substitutions such as 'reduced sodium salt' – these products are still likely to add some salt to your diet.



Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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