



# NLOSS

North London Obesity Surgery Service

## Thiamine

### Patient Information

#### What does thiamine do?

Thiamine (vitamin B1) is an important nutrient for taking energy from food and turning it into energy for your brain, nerves and heart. It is needed by the body to process carbohydrates, fats, and proteins – but it is most important for how we process carbohydrates (sugars and starches).

#### What happens if my thiamine is low/if I do not get enough thiamine?

Your body stores very little thiamine, so deficiency can happen very quickly – especially if you are not eating much or if you are vomiting for any reason.

Thiamine deficiency may be called Beriberi or Wernicke's Encephalopathy depending on how it presents.

#### What are other symptoms?

When you do not get enough thiamine, **you may first have nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, fatigue and difficulty concentrating.** You may also have **weakness, sleepiness, changes in personality and memory, leg and foot cramping, burning feet, headache, constipation, and cramping.**

If thiamine deficiency is **severe, serious problems can result including loss of hearing, permanent nerve damage, coma, permanent brain damage, heart damage, liver damage, and death.**

#### Other symptoms

- Blurred or double vision
- Difficulty taking/swallowing
- Facial weakness
- Amnesia, memory loss, dementia
- Rapid heartbeat
- Faintness on standing up
- Leg swelling
- Difficulty urinating
- Numb/painful hands/feet
- Foot drop, leg weakness
- Clumsiness, loss of balance, falling
- Loss of muscle



## Where can I get thiamine?

Thiamine is found throughout the diet, but fortified cereals, beans/peas, nuts and pork are especially good sources. Other sources are also milk, cheese, fresh and dried fruit, and eggs.

Some foods can also inhibit thiamine absorption – the most important ones are coffee, black tea and alcohol.

Thiamine is also found in dietary supplements. Almost all multivitamins have thiamine. It is also found in B- complex and alone in tablets or capsules. Thiamine has a sulfuric smell that many people find unpleasant, but it is normal. If you have thiamine deficiency, your doctor will probably ask you to take supplemental thiamine and watch your dietary intake.

## Other important things

If you have thiamine deficiency, it is important that you follow up with your doctor for lab tests and other recommended care.

**Should you need more information, please contact  
our Specialist Bariatric Dietitians on 0207 288 5989.**

### 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.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please email [whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net). We will try our best to meet your needs.

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