

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Dietary information for people at risk of malignant bowel obstruction

This leaflet is aimed at people who are at risk of a malignant bowel obstruction. Your oncology team will have let you know if this applies to you. This leaflet aims to provide some guidance to reduce your risk of developing malignant bowel obstruction.

You may also be referred to the oncology dietitian who can offer further guidance.

What is a malignant bowel obstruction?

A malignant bowel obstruction is a blockage or narrowing of the bowel caused by cancer. The bowel can be completely blocked or partially blocked.

Why am I at risk of a bowel obstruction?

- You may have cancer inside the bowel or nearby preventing food passing through normally.
- You may have a cancer elsewhere which has spread and could press on the bowel.
- You may have cancer that has grown into the nerve supply of the bowel, and the bowel muscles are no longer working properly.

Symptoms that could be a sign your bowel may be blocked include:

- Abdominal (tummy) pain.
- Vomiting/ feeling sick
- Feeling full quickly (after food or drink).
- Bowels not opened or passed wind for more than two days.
- Bloating.

Please seek medical attention if you are experiencing these symptoms.

Background

Some foods are more difficult for the body to break down. When they pass through the digestive system without being broken down properly, they can risk getting caught in a narrowing of the bowel.

What can I do to minimise the risk?

Avoid foods high in fibre that are more difficult to digest. For example:

- Raw vegetables.
- Mushrooms.
- Sweetcorn.
- Rhubarb.
- Celery.
- Pineapple.
- Nuts.
- Seeds.
- Dried fruit.
- Any foods which contain the above items. listed (e.g. chocolate containing fruit and/or nuts).
- Gristle on meat.

General tips:

- Remove the skins, seeds and pith of fruits and vegetable.
- Root vegetables which are well-cooked are safe to include (e.g. carrots, parsnips, turnips, sweet potato).
- Other suitable vegetables include broccoli and cauliflower with the stalks removed (florets heads only) and avocado.
- Suitable fruits include bananas, peeled apples, mango, watermelon (no seeds), plums (peeled) and tinned fruit.

- If using onion and garlic, ensure finely chopped and well-cooked (e.g. into a paste).
- Dried herbs and spices can be included and help to improve variety within your diet - smooth nut butters and hummus can be included.
- If you are thought to be high risk of malignant bowel obstruction it is advisable to avoid bread/bread products.

What if I am not eating well or losing weight on this diet?

- Aim for little and often snacks and meals (graze every two to three hours throughout the day).
- Add extra high-calorie options into your food such as full-fat milk, double cream, butter, olive oil, cheese.
- Add extra high-protein options such as meat (not gristly meat), fish without bones, eggs, smooth nut butter.
- Drink nourishing drinks such as glasses of full-fat milk, fortified milk (one pint of whole milk with two to four tablespoons of dried skimmed-milk powder mixed in), homemade milkshakes with double cream, ice cream or yogurt (your dietitian can provide further information as required).

Contact details:

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics
King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
NG17 4JL
Telephone: 01623676025

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions
Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202607-01-DIBO
Created: July 2026 / Review Date: July 2028