

Nutritional Requirements After Bariatric Surgery

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KEYWORDS

- Bariatric surgery • Postoperative bariatric • Bariatric diet • Postoperative diet stages
- Dumping syndrome • Micronutrient supplementation • Nutrition support

KEY POINTS

- Postoperative nutritional requirements after bariatric surgery vary.
- Bariatric surgeries share common nutritional goals.
- Staged protocol-based meal progression in bariatric patients is recommended after surgery.
- Prevention of dumping syndrome requires dietary modifications to avoid associated symptoms.
- Nutrient intake may be inadequate because of restrictive or nutrient malabsorptive components of bariatric surgeries.
- Adequate fluid intake is important to prevent dehydration.
- Patients may require nutrition support after bariatric surgery.
- Progress toward successful weight loss does not stop with the bariatric surgery.

INTRODUCTION

The nutritional care of the bariatric patient is a fine balance between bariatric diet protocols and individual postoperative dietary tolerances. The role of a registered dietitian (RD) in postoperative bariatric care is to adapt the established bariatric diet protocols to individual tolerances, lifestyles, and nutritional requirements.

MANAGEMENT GOALS

Bariatric surgery diet protocols are surgeon specific and may vary in the progression of diet stages. However, they all share common nutritional goals¹:

- Maximize weight loss and absorption of nutrients
- Maintain adequate hydration
- Avoid vomiting and dumping syndrome

Conflict of Interest: The author is employed by Sodexo, USA.

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The nutritional care after bariatric surgery focuses on adequate energy and nutrient intake to support postoperative tissue healing and preservation of lean body mass during rapid weight loss.² The foods and beverages consumed should minimize reflux, early satiety, and dumping syndrome and maximize weight loss and later weight maintenance.² Patients should be advised to avoid pregnancy before bariatric surgery and for 12 to 18 months after surgery. Those who become pregnant after bariatric surgery should be counseled and monitored for appropriate weight gain, nutritional supplementation, and for fetal health.³

Diet Stages and Progression

A staged protocol-based meal progression in bariatric patients is recommended after surgery. To improve surgical outcomes, patients should receive instructions on their specific bariatric surgery's postoperative diet stages before the surgery.² A low-sugar or sugar-free clear liquid diet can usually be initiated within 24 hours³ after a bariatric procedure and then progressed in accordance with the surgeon's protocol and tolerance. Water is typically the first step toward clear liquids. The clear liquids are usually at room temperature, recommended for 1 to 2 days, and most commonly include diet gelatin, broth, sugar-free popsicles, decaffeinated or herbal teas, artificially sweetened beverages, and in some protocols diluted fruit juices.² Bariatric clear liquids exclude sugar, carbonation, caffeine, and alcohol and avoid the use of straws.^{1,2}

A low-sugar or sugar-free full liquid diet follows the clear liquid diet. Full liquids commonly include milk (use cautiously with lactose intolerance after bariatric surgery) and milk alternatives, vegetable juice, plain or artificially sweetened yogurt (without fruit pieces), strained cream soups, cream cereals, and sugar-free puddings.² Diet progression varies based on surgeon's protocol and patient's tolerance. Most commonly full liquids are recommended for 10 to 14 days² and longer on some protocols. Protein supplements should be included to meet the dietary protein needs of the patient.

A pureed diet is typically the diet texture that follows full liquids on the bariatric diet protocol. It consists of foods that have been blended and liquefied and can range from milkshake to mashed potato consistency. Scrambled eggs, egg substitute, flaked fish, pureed meats and meat alternatives, pureed fruits and vegetables, soft cheeses, and hot cereal are often included.² Pureed diets are commonly advised for 10 to 14 or more days and protein supplements are continued during this diet stage to supplement protein intake.²

Following the pureed diet, patients progress to a bariatric soft diet and remain on this diet stage for the next 14 or more days.² It commonly includes ground and chopped tender meats and meat alternatives, canned fruit, soft fresh fruit, canned vegetables, soft cooked vegetables, and grains as tolerated. It is important to keep food moist, especially meat. After 6 to 8 weeks from the surgery, patients typically progress to a regular bariatric diet.² During this time patients should transition from 6 small to 3 small meals with scheduled snacks during the day. Patients should chew small bites of food thoroughly and slowly before swallowing. Protein-rich foods should be consumed first during a meal. Protein supplements are continued if patients are unable to meet their protein needs with meals and snacks.

All bariatric diet stages often avoid or delay introduction of²:

- Sugar, concentrated sweets
- Carbonated beverages
- Fruit juice (undiluted)

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