

MANAGING YOUR SHORT BOWEL SYNDROME

What Is Short Bowel Syndrome?

Short bowel syndrome occurs as a complication of major surgery of the small bowel (intestine). After surgery, not enough bowel is left to get nutrients from food. The result is that people can become malnourished.

What Causes Short Bowel Syndrome?

If more than half of the bowel is taken out during surgery, the risk of small bowel syndrome is great. Disorders of the small bowel that may need surgical treatment include congenital abnormalities and necrotizing enterocolitis in infants and Crohn disease in adults.

What Are the Symptoms of Short Bowel Syndrome?

The key symptoms are diarrhea, seen as large amounts of foul-smelling stools, and weight loss. Painful cramps in the abdomen (belly), bloating, heartburn, tiredness, and weakness also occur. Symptoms usually begin a few days after abdominal surgery.

How Is Short Bowel Syndrome Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis by taking a medical history and doing blood tests and an upper gastrointestinal (GI) barium x-ray study. For this x-ray, a chalky substance, barium, is swallowed and moves quickly through the stomach and small bowel. X-rays are then taken to show what the small bowel looks like.

How Is Short Bowel Syndrome Treated?

Treatment involves nutritional support. The treatment at first is usually intravenous hyperalimentation (TPN, or total parenteral nutrition). Liquid mixtures with all required nutrients

are given through a vein. This type of feeding allows the bowel to rest and somewhat recover. Hospitalization may be needed.

Medicines may be given to help prevent secretion of acid and excessive fluids by the stomach.

Usually after 1 to 4 weeks, the diarrhea will go away and the appetite will return. At this time, enteral feedings are started. For these feedings, mixtures are put through a tube directly into the stomach. This is a slow process while the intestine learns to work again. After weeks to months of this, feedings by mouth are slowly given.

Close monitoring of the diet is key to successful treatment. A high-calorie, low-fat, low-residue diet is needed. In some cases, people use TPN for the rest of their life. Fat-soluble vitamins and mineral supplements are also taken.

Symptoms may get better over time but will always mean close attention to diet.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Short Bowel Syndrome

- ✓ **DO** be patient. This condition takes months to slowly get better and may need lifelong treatment.
- ✓ **DO** take vitamin and mineral supplements as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have diarrhea after bowel surgery.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you're being treated for short bowel syndrome and your symptoms worsen or return.
- ⊗ **DON'T** eat high-fat foods.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Gastro-Intestinal Research Foundation: Tel: (312) 332-1350; Website:
<http://www.girf.org>
- American College of Surgeons: Tel: (800) 621-4111; Website: <http://www.facs.org>

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