



# Steatorrhea

COMS (Centre for Obesity  
Management and Surgery)

# What is steatorrhea?

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Steatorrhea is the presence of excess fat in the stool, making it bulky, oily, and foul-smelling. Commonly bypass procedures such as Roux-en-Y gastric bypass (RYGB) and One Anastomosis Gastric Bypass (OAGB), significantly alters digestion and fat absorption, resulting in steatorrhea.

## What are the symptoms of steatorrhea?

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- Pale, oily, or greasy stools that may float on water.
- Malodorous stools.
- Loose stools or diarrhoea.
- Stomach cramps.
- Feeling of being bloated.



## What causes steatorrhea after Bariatric Surgery?

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### + Reduced Fat Digestion

Bile emulsifies fat to make it easier to digest. After bariatric surgery, the altered anatomy makes bile mixing with food less efficient. This in turn, causes fat to pass through the intestines without being fully digested.

### + Malabsorption of Fats

The bypassed portion of small bowel along with intestinal hurry, reduces the surface area and contact time for nutrient absorption. Since fats require a large surface area for digestion, their absorption is impaired, resulting in steatorrhea.

### + Increased Fat Intake

The reduced ability to process fat due to surgery can result in undigested fat being excreted in the stool after a high-fat meal.

# How to manage steatorrhea?

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## + Reduce Fat Intake

Patients should limit high-fat foods such as fried foods, fatty meats, and full-fat dairy. A diet lower in fat is typically recommended, focusing on lean proteins and complex carbohydrates. Our dietitian can help tailor a meal plan that minimises fat intake while ensuring proper nutrient absorption.

## + Small and Frequent Meals

Eating smaller and more frequent meals helps the digestive system manage food and absorb nutrients more efficiently.

## + Pancreatic Enzyme Supplements

If the body is not producing enough enzymes to digest fats properly, your doctor may prescribe pancreatic enzyme replacements to aid digestion and reduce steatorrhea.

## + Monitor for Nutritional Deficiencies

Steatorrhea can lead to deficiencies in fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) because they are absorbed along with dietary fats. Regular monitoring and supplementation of these vitamins may be necessary.

## + Stay Hydrated

Steatorrhea may lead to diarrhoea, so it is important to stay hydrated and replace electrolytes if needed.

# When to seek medical advice?

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If steatorrhea persists, becomes severe, or is accompanied by other symptoms like weight loss, malnutrition, or dehydration, it is important to follow up with your healthcare provider. Long-term untreated steatorrhea can lead to serious complications, including deficiencies, malnutrition, and if unmanaged, even death.

## Our Patient Care Institutions

National University Hospital

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital &

Jurong Community Hospital

Alexandra Hospital

National University Polyclinics

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National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

National University Heart Centre, Singapore

National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore

NUHS Diagnostics

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