

Lap-Band Questions: These are questions that I have received and the answers that I gave, and/or research that I have done during my personal Lap-Band journey. They are meant to share my experiences and viewpoints and do not in any way replace or supplant your doctor's advice.

Shoulder Pain/Food Stuck

I can't tell what is causing your pain but I can tell you that I experienced the same thing from time to time and I can tell you what has caused mine and what has helped in the past. For me, it was either something got stuck (I took a pill that was too large, or ate sushi rice, or the doughy part of bread), or it was just that I really needed to burp, usually the latter.

You see, I have made the discovery that for me, there are very few foods that actually get stuck or that I cannot eat. The problem usually occurs when I let myself get too hungry and my stomach gets filled with a lot of air. Then, when I eat, as the food tries to pass through the band the air is being displaced by the food, but it has nowhere to go because the food is blocking its escape at the band site. This is much like the air bubbles you get when you try to sink an empty glass or bottle into water. Until that bubble breaks and the air escapes, the water (or food in this case) cannot get in. When this happens, the pressure builds up in your esophagus and presses on your diaphragm and causes the pain in the shoulder. This will sometimes happen, even with my protein shakes, so it is not that my food pieces are too large or the wrong consistency, it is just the mechanics of the band and our stomachs.

My solution has usually been to ask my husband to burp me. Yeah, I know, it sounds crazy, but I know now why babies cry if you don't burp them properly, it hurts! Sometimes I can make myself burp if it is not too bad, but I have never been very good at that, so I usually ask for his discreet help. I doesn't usually take too much, just a few well placed pats on the back and it dislodges the food or pops the air pocket and I burp like a sailor and go on eating as before.

I hope this helps you some, but do follow up with your doctor if it continues. I have read many stories of people waiting it out and making the problem much worse than it needed to be. And if you have a true blockage (say from a pill or something) that is nothing to mess around with.

How often can I eat? How do I get in all the necessary calories and nutrients?

It is all a bit confusing but it works out, and you are right that it will get better with time. But for now, let me see if I can help. Most docs, the ones that I know of anyway, recommend three meals a day but they also allow two or three "snacks" per day. My doc just calls them meals if they are over 100 calories, and says to eat every three hours, regardless of what you call it.

I have what I consider perfect restriction (I have found my "sweet spot") and my calories range between 1100-1300 calories per day. I can only eat about 4-6 ounces of food at a time so I try to focus on my protein first by following the 3-3-1 rule. It goes like this:

- Each meal should consist of:
 - o A protein the size of the palm of your hand or a single deck of cards
 - o A fruit or vegetable the size of your cupped hand
 - o A complex carbohydrate the size of your cupped hand
 - o Note - you portion sizes will get smaller as you get more restriction but this is a

good place to start

- Follow the 3-3-1 rule
 - o First have 3 bites of your protein
 - o Next have 3 bites of your veggie
 - o Finally have 1 bite of your carb
- Take small bites, chew very well, and pace yourself so you will know when you are full. (Using baby spoons and forks is a good way to train yourself to take smaller bites.)
- STOP as soon as you feel satisfied. Do not overeat!

If you are hungry again in less than 2 1/2 hours, you probably didn't eat enough. If you are not hungry in more than 3 1/2-4 hours, you probably ate too much. You should adjust your portions accordingly beginning with your next meal.

I also have at least one protein shake per day to be sure that I get the minimum required 80 grams of protein in per day (100 grams for men). I usually have two (one as breakfast and one as my bedtime treat) because I workout a lot and my portions of solid food are so small now (and I like them), but one is enough for most people. (See Ultimate Protein Shake)

Why can't I drink with meals? How long do I have to wait before drinking after a meal?

The absolute best you can do is to wait an hour but that is often very hard to do. However, the minimum that you need to wait is 30 mins. so you don't defeat the purpose of the band. The reason for not drinking (in case no one explained it or anyone else is wondering) is that the band works by holding the food you eat in your stoma long enough for your brain to get the message that you are full with only a small amount of food intake. If you drink too soon after eating, the food is washed down through the band, into your vastly larger stomach (like flushing a toilet), before the message is sent. So you end up with all the calories that you just ate AND you are hungry again in a very short order.

Corrective surgery vs. elective surgery

I have seen many posts on this site regarding "self-pays" worried about paying for subsequent surgery when they have a problem such as slippage. You should all be aware that even though the Lap-band surgery was elective and may not have been covered by your insurance, problems that arise later are very different! If you have a slippage for instance, that is potentially life threatening and MUST be corrected. That means it is required, not elective, surgery and your insurance must pay for it.

Go to the mat with your insurance company, even call the insurance commissioner's office for help if you have to, write the appeal letters and ask your doctors' office to help you if need be, but make them cover it! Don't take no for an answer, and DO NOT put off proper care because you are worried about the cost. Besides, any doctor worth their Hippocratic Oath will do the surgery regardless of your coverage, if your health is at risk.

Please take care of yourself first and the details later.

The Ultimate Protein Shake

I use American Whey protein powder for several reasons.

1. It is lactose free (which often means less gas)
2. It has very few sugars and no artificial sweeteners
3. It has the highest protein per serving that I found (20g per scoop)
4. It tastes GOOD! It is not watery or slimy. (The way I make it anyway, see recipe below.)
5. The price is right. I buy at buildingbrawn.com

To make the best protein shake you ever had, try this.

- In a personal sized blender (I use the Hamilton Beach personal blender with travel lid 51101; just Google it)
- Add the following ingredients (in this order for best results)
 - 2 scoops American Whey Vanilla protein powder
 - 3 teaspoons Hershey's baking cocoa (it has no fat, no sugar, and only 50 calories and is crucial to the flavor and cuts down on the air bubbles)
 - 4 ice cubes
 - 1/2 to whole banana (the potassium benefit outweighs the "cost" of natural sugars in the banana)
 - enough water to fill the cup
- Blend completely
- ENJOY completely!



Substitutions/Additions:

- For more calcium use milk instead of water
- Add 3 tablespoons of vanilla yogurt
- If you add these ingredients, put them in the cup first and blend with the protein powder and cocoa before you add the other ingredients or the shake will not blend well.

Well, I know that is a lot of information to digest at once so I am going to stop. But please feel free to ask all the questions you want. I am full ofopinions, yeah, opinions. I have also been banded for 18 months now and I have learned a few things, but I still remember how confused I was in the beginning too. You can PM me if you don't want to post your questions publicly, although others usually benefit when you do.

How do you know when you have reached your “sweet spot”?

Truthfully, I didn't know for a while. I kept thinking that maybe I needed one more fill. But then, with my husband's objective observations, I realized that I was only eating about 4 oz, on average, of food per meal to be very satisfied. Then I would be fine for about three hours and the bottom would fall out and I would be really hungry, so I would eat again. Then, every once in a while, I would have to eat something really slowly to get it down, sometimes even my shake was slow going and I would have to stop and burp before I could finish it.

With an upcoming appointment with my doc, I began talking about another fill and my husband reminded me of those times when things were slow to go down and just how little I was actually eating at a meal or even per day. He suggested that I might want to rethink whether I actually needed a fill. I took a good look at those things, and decided that I probably didn't need a fill, I was just frustrated because the weight wasn't coming off as quickly anymore because I was down to my last 30 pounds (23 now). Then my doc ordered an upper GI before even considering another fill, and we saw how small the stoma and the opening in the band are, I realized that I am where I need to be with the band for now. The rest is up to me. Those last few are always going to be the hardest to lose anyway, and if I have another fill right now, I am afraid that I would not be able to eat a lot of great foods that I really love.

Basically, your sweet spot is the point where you are able to eat enough food to sustain your body at a healthy level (all your blood work is good, protein is sufficient, vitamins are good, not anemic, etc.), but you are not able to totally pig out when you get frustrated, upset, or lonely, etc.

Remember too that you may find your sweet spot and lose it several times before you reach your goal, because as you lose weight, you also lose fat around your organs including your stomach. So the band may be perfect for several months or longer and suddenly, you can eat a side of beef 🍖.

The reason is that you lost some fatty tissue around your stomach and now the band is looser than it was before. It really doesn't happen overnight, but it sometimes feels that way. This is where keeping a food journal comes in handy, you can see in black and white (if you are being honest and diligent) when you started eating more and how much more. That helps the docs know when you need a fill too. Then you get another fill or two, find your sweet spot again, and start over.

I have not had a fill since mid August 2007 (8 1/2 months), and I am still good. I think most of the fat around my stomach is gone now, so there aren't as many changes to be made. Plus, I have 10cc in a 14cc band, so there isn't much more that could be done, so it's a good thing I have found my sweet spot.

BTW-all of my blood work was great, the doc even commented that she wished everyone's protein levels were as good as mine. I celebrated that news with a protein shake too!