

Fasting Requirements Before Surgery

To prevent complications during surgery, we ask that you fast for a specific period of time before surgery so that your stomach is empty. **If you do not follow our fasting requirements, your surgery may be canceled or delayed.** If you do not fast correctly, you might vomit your stomach contents and choke during surgery or inhale your stomach contents into your lungs during surgery (i.e., pulmonary aspiration), which can lead to pneumonia. You might hear your healthcare professionals call these fasting requirements NPO guidelines because “NPO” is an abbreviation for “nothing by mouth” in Latin.

These requirements apply only to healthy patients who are undergoing elective procedures. The requirements do not apply to women in labor. **If you have a medical problem such as diabetes, renal failure, increased intracranial pressure, morbid obesity, hiatal hernia, or acid reflux, you should not have any solid food after midnight prior to the day of surgery or eight hours before surgery.** You are allowed to take essential oral medications (seizure medication, blood pressure medication, etc.) as needed on the day of surgery with a sip of water.

The fasting requirements in the chart below represent the minimum fasting period for healthy patients. The longer the fasting period and the less complex the food (i.e., no fatty foods or meat), the lower the risk of complications. **Note:** Although not mandatory, you might want to stop eating or drinking earlier than required (unless your surgery is the first one of the day). This might allow your surgery to start earlier if other cases are canceled or delayed. **If you have any questions about the fasting requirements, please ask one of your healthcare professionals.**

Summary of Fasting Requirements for Healthy Patients¹

Stop this type of food/liquid:	At least this number of hours before surgery:	Additional information:
Clear Liquids	2 hours	Clear liquids include water, glucose water, fruit juices without pulp (e.g., apple juice, grape juice), carbonated beverages, clear tea, and black coffee. Clear liquids do not include alcohol, orange juice, milk, or infant formula. For healthy patients, the last clear liquids should be no more than 8 oz (1 cup).
Breast Milk	4 hours	–
Infant Formula	6 hours	–
Non-Human Milk	6 hours	Examples include cow milk, soy milk, and rice milk.
Light Meal	6 hours	A light meal consists of toast and a beverage (i.e., water, fruit juices without pulp [e.g., apple juice], carbonated beverages, tea or coffee with creamer). The light meal should not include meat, any fried or fatty foods, alcohol, mints, gum, or candies.
Regular Meal	8 hours	This meal can include meat and fatty foods. However, the less complex the meal (i.e., no fatty foods or meat), the lower the risk of complications. Do not have any mints, gum, or candies during the eight-hour fasting period.

¹Practice guidelines for preoperative fasting and the use of pharmacologic agents to reduce the risk of pulmonary aspiration: application to healthy patients undergoing elective procedures: a report by the American Society of Anesthesiologist Task Force on Preoperative Fasting. *Anesthesiology*. 1999; 90(3): 896–905.