

Patient information

Fibre

What is Fibre?

Dietary fibre (or roughage) is the indigestible part of plants that maintains the structure of the plant. It is this indigestibility which makes fibres important in both the normal functioning and in disorders of the large intestine or colon. Most foods containing fibre can benefit you and help give bulk to your diet, but some of the coarser, rougher fibres can actually cause discomfort and add to the difficulties you may have.

There are two kinds of fibre:

- **Soluble fibre**, which is normally soft moist fibre, found in fruit (but not the skins), and vegetables and pulses.
- **Insoluble fibre**, which is mainly the outer shell of seeds, grains, fruits, and vegetables. It is the tougher less digestible fibre, it will not 'mash-up' and can be stringy or coarse.

In certain medical conditions, it is important to restrict fibre (insoluble fibre). These include acute or subacute diverticulitis, and acute phases of certain inflammatory bowel conditions eg ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. After some types of intestinal surgery, a low fibre, low residue diet may be used as a transition to a regular diet. A low fibre diet may also be used for a period of time after a colostomy or ileostomy is performed.

Tips on fibre

- Try to include fibre in your diet, but where possible make selections from the soluble fibre list.
- If you like to eat foods from the insoluble fibre group, peeling the skin or removing the seeds and just eating the pulp of the fruit or vegetable generally makes them more palatable.

- Cooking fruit and vegetables softens some of the fibre and makes it more soluble.
- Ripe fruit and vegetables have more soluble fibre.
- Pulses are an excellent source of soluble fibre.
- It is essential that you drink plenty of fluids, without adequate fluid intake, fibre can cause you to become constipated. Try to drink at least 8-10 cups of fluid per day.

Foods to include - high in soluble fibre

- **Fruits:** Apples (not skins) fresh, stewed, baked, tinned. Pears (not skins). Bananas – ripe. Stone fruit – plums, peaches and nectarines (avoid skins). Tinned fruit – except citrus fruit. Melon, strained fruit juices, tomato juice.
- **Vegetables:** Carrots, parsnips, turnips, swede, baby peas and split peas, beans, lentils, root vegetables, avocado, potatoes (without skins) chick peas, beetroot, broccoli (cooked), cauliflower (cooked), tinned tomatoes, no seeds or skins.
- **Bread and cereals:** Oats, porridge, Ready Brek®, wholemeal bread, white bread, white rice, white pasta.
- **Miscellaneous:** Tahini, hummus.

Foods to take care with - high in insoluble fibre

- **Fruits:** Citrus fruits, cherries, grapes, berry fruits, eg strawberries, raspberries. Kiwi fruits, green banana.
- **Vegetables:** Spinach, asparagus, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, mange tout, large/old peas, sweetcorn, broad beans, green beans, tomatoes, cucumber, lettuce, red/green/yellow peppers, courgettes, marrow, sugar snap peas, aubergine, artichoke.
- **Bread and cereals:** Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Bran Flakes, granary or seed loaves, wholegrain bread, brown rice, wholemeal pasta, digestive biscuits, wholegrain biscuits.
- **Miscellaneous:** Nuts, seeds, peanut butter.

This leaflet has been designed as a guide to help your current problems. It is not advised to follow the restrictions permanently. If you have any specific dietary requirements, please inform your doctor/specialist nurse as a dietitian referral may be required.