



A guide to...

Low Fibre Diet for Inflammatory Bowel Disease

For use during an acute flare-up

Patient Information

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Introduction

This information is on the temporary use of a low-fibre diet to help relieve the symptoms of ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease during a flare-up.

What are the symptoms of a flare-up?

During a flare-up, the large or small intestine becomes actively inflamed. Common symptoms include diarrhoea, stomach pain and cramping, rectal pain and bleeding, fatigue, and urgent and night-time bowel movements. These symptoms may continue only for a few days, or up to a few months. While we don't yet know what causes flare-ups, triggers could include stress or medication changes.

What is a low-fibre diet?

A low-fibre diet aims to restrict foods which are high in fibre. Fibre is the roughage found in all plant foods, including vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as lentils and peas.

There are three types of fibre in plant foods:

1. **Soluble fibre**, which dissolves in water in the gut. It helps to absorb fluid and soften the stool
2. **Prebiotic fibre** (including resistant starch), which is not digested in the small intestine and is moved into the large intestine, where it feeds your good gut bacteria. They help to maintain your immune system, regulate your mood, and produce vitamins.
3. **Insoluble fibre** does not dissolve in water and therefore is not well digested. It adds bulk to the stool and acts as a brush to clean the gut.

During a flare up, the rough texture of insoluble fibre is more likely to cause irritation to the inflamed gut. It can aggravate diarrhoea by pulling water into the gut and increase stool size, which may cause blockages. Restricting insoluble fibre may therefore help to relieve flare-up symptoms. Soluble fibre may be better tolerated during a flare-up and may also help with constipation.

How long should I follow a low fibre diet?

Reducing fibre in your diet will not treat the underlying bowel disease. A low-fibre diet is only recommended for symptom relief during flare-ups. As soon as symptoms improve, fibre needs to be introduced back into the diet in a gradual manner.

You should not follow a low-fibre diet for longer than two weeks.

If your symptoms have not improved after two weeks, you should seek further help from your doctor or nurse specialist, who may refer you to a dietitian. Fibre is an essential component of a varied and balanced diet, which is essential to maintain health and well-being. For people with Crohn's Disease, a balanced and varied fibre-rich diet is important to aid recovery and maintain remission. Restricting fibre-rich food without further consultation is not safe for people with inflammatory bowel disease.

What if I lose weight during a flare-up?

Increasing your protein and energy intake will help prevent further weight loss and improve your general health. High protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, and cheese should be included in each main meal, including breakfast. Foods high in healthy fats such as olive or rapeseed oil, avocados, and nut butters (small amounts if tolerated) will also increase your energy intake.

If you have a small appetite; smaller meals and more snacks will help to prevent weight loss. High energy and protein snack ideas include cheese and white crackers, thick and creamy yogurt with cooked and pureed fruit, and milkshakes made with full cream milk and added milk powder.

Fluid intake is important to prevent constipation and to replace lost fluids if you have diarrhoea. Aim to drink two to three pints (1-1.5 litres) a day of water, squash, cordial, milk, tea and coffee.

What can I eat as part of a low-fibre diet?

- Removing the skin/peel, stalks and pips from fruit and vegetables will reduce insoluble fibre
- Ripe fruits generally have less fibre than unripe fruits
- Cooking fruits and vegetables changes the structure of the fibre, which aids digestion.

	CHOOSE	MINIMAL AMOUNTS	AVOID
Vegetables	Boiled and mashed potato, sweet potato, pumpkin, butternut, squashes, zucchini, carrot, swede, beetroot, marrow	Cauliflower and broccoli floret tips only, asparagus tips. Cooked and mashed eggplant	Artichoke, cabbage, curly kale, celery, fennel, leek, onions, okra, pepper, peas, mature spinach, sprouts, sweetcorn, radishes, yam and cassava Roasted potatoes, potato chips, potato croquettes Raw vegetable smoothies
Salad vegetables	Skinless and seedless tomato, shredded lettuce, young spinach, rocket (chew thoroughly)	Skinless and seedless cucumber	
Fruit	Peeled, canned, stewed or well-cooked Peaches, nectarine, apple, pear, plums, fruit cocktail, mango, lychees, apricot Canned fruits except pineapple/ prunes Fruit juice – no pulp Avocado (smooth)	Melons, ripe banana, seedless grapes	Canned pineapple and prunes Apples, pears, pineapple, citrus fruit, berries, and currants Dried fruit Raw fruit smoothies Fruit juice with pulp
Meat, nuts and seeds, legumes, and dairy	Any tender and soft meat, chicken, and fish. All meat, fish and chicken Tofu Eggs All milk and cheese products with no added nuts, seeds, and cereals	Nut butters	All legumes, including baked beans, peas, lentils, and chickpeas All seeds, including pumpkin, chia, sunflower and sesame seeds Plant based protein powders

	CHOOSE	MINIMAL AMOUNTS	AVOID
Grains	<p>All baked products made with white flour</p> <p>Refined breakfast cereals, such as Special K, Cornflakes and Rice Krispies</p> <p>White rice, pasta, noodles, tapioca, semolina</p> <p>Plain biscuits such as rich tea/ custard creams</p> <p>Plain crackers</p> <p>Plain sponge cake</p>	<p>Oats porridge</p> <p>Oatcakes</p> <p>Baked products with oat flour</p>	<p>All baked products made with wholegrain wheat, or rye, spelt and barley flour</p> <p>Any baked products with added fruits and nuts</p> <p>Wholegrain cereals, such as Weetabix, All Bran, porridge oats, muesli, bran</p> <p>Wheat germ, spelt, bulgur wheat</p> <p>Wholegrain rice, pasta, couscous, pearl barley, quinoa, oatmeal, noodles</p> <p>Whole wheat biscuits e.g., flapjacks, rye crispbreads</p>

How to re-introduce fibre

- Introduce one food at a time and monitor symptoms for one to two days before trying the next food
- Try small amounts at the beginning
- Keeping a food and symptoms diary during the reintroduction period may help to identify foods that are not well tolerated
- Avoid high fibre foods that have triggered gastro-intestinal symptoms in the past. These may include onions, leeks, garlic, sweetcorn, peas, beans, and lentils. You could try to reintroduce these when you feel confident to try them again.

Suggested one week re-introduction plan

1. Start by introducing wholegrain cereals, breads, and biscuits. On the first day, eat only half portions. If tolerated, increase to full portions after one to two days.
2. Next, try the vegetables and fruit on the choose list with skins, peels, pips and stems. On the first day eat only half portions. If tolerated, increase to full portions after one to two days.
3. Finally, try vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds on the avoid list. On the first day eat only half portions. If tolerated, increase to full portions after one to two days.