



FIBRE & BOWEL HEALTH

Fibre is important for maintaining health. It can help in managing weight and cholesterol and blood glucose in diabetes. Fibre is particularly important for digestion and keeping your bowel healthy. Some types of fibre may also protect against bowel cancer. Good sources of fibre include wholemeal bread and flour, fruit, vegetables, cereals, nuts and seeds.

WHAT IS FIBRE

Fibre comes from plants. There are two types of fibre: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fibre is found in oats, legumes, fruit, vegetables, seeds, cereals and fibre supplements. Insoluble fibre is found in large amounts in wheat bran and also in some vegetables and legumes.

FIBRE & DIGESTION

Fibre passes through the small intestine into the large bowel where bacteria break down and ferment them. Some fibre produces a lot of gas when fermented which can lead to wind.

FIBRE & HEALTH

Both soluble and insoluble fibre add bulk to the bowel motions (faeces), making them easier to pass. Soluble fibre also:

- slows the digestion and absorption of sugars which can help to control blood glucose in diabetes
- reduces the absorption of cholesterol from the gut, helping to lower blood levels (see *Fat & Cholesterol* Fact Card)
- helps with weight control by increasing the feeling of fullness after eating, and fibre-rich foods are often low in fat

FIBRE, RESISTANT STARCH & BOWEL CANCER

Starch is often present with fibre, but it is usually broken down in the small intestine.

However, some starch, known as resistant starch, isn't broken down until it reaches the bowel.

Resistant starch is found in foods that aren't a major part of Western diets (or are not eaten in large enough amounts). This includes green bananas, half-cooked pasta, lentils, baked beans, chickpeas etc. It is also in some breakfast cereals and fibre supplements (see *Fibre Supplements* section).

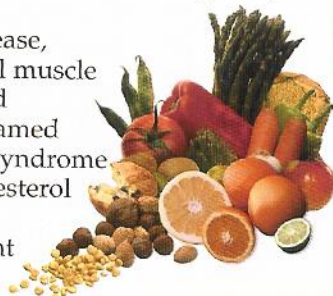
When bacteria in the bowel ferments fibre and resistant starch, they grow and multiply. This increases the bulk of the faeces, making it easier and quicker to pass. If faeces pass more quickly through the bowel, there is less time for possible cancer-causing substances to be in contact with the lining of the bowel.

As they ferment, fibre and resistant starch produce substances known as short chain fatty acids. Some of these may protect against the growth of bowel cancer.

EFFECTS OF LOW FIBRE

A low fibre diet can contribute to:

- constipation and haemorrhoids ('piles')
- bowel cancer
- diverticular disease, where the bowel muscle is weakened and can become inflamed
- irritable bowel syndrome
- high blood cholesterol levels
- being overweight



EATING MORE FIBRE

Eating more fibre can add variety to your diet. It also has great health benefits. Foods that are high in fibre usually contain many vitamins, minerals and essential nutrients. Good sources of fibre include:

Breads, cereals & grains

- wholemeal, wholegrain, multigrain, white with added fibre, soy and linseed, wholemeal Lebanese or pita breads
- wholemeal English muffins, especially if they also contain oats and bran
- cakes, biscuits, scones and muffins made with wholemeal flour (some may be high in fat)
- wholegrain crackers (e.g. *Ryvita*) and wholemeal crackers (e.g. *Vita Wheat*).

Breakfast cereals

- rolled oats, oat bran, wholemeal porridge
- bran cereals e.g. *All-Bran*, *Sultana Bran*
- unprocessed wheat bran (2 tablespoons a day is enough), oat bran, rice bran cereals
- whole wheat breakfast cereals e.g. *Weetbix*, *Weeties*, *Vita Brits* etc.
- muesli (toasted muesli is often high in fat - check the label).

Grains and grain foods

- oats, rye, buckwheat, cracked wheat
- brown rice, polenta, couscous
- pasta - white, spinach or wholemeal.

Vegetables

- legumes such as chick peas, lentils
- beans e.g. baked, broad, butter, kidney, Lima, soy beans etc.
- potatoes, carrots, beetroot, parsnips, sweet potatoes, turnips, yams
- broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, mushrooms, leeks, peas, snow peas, spinach
- salad vegetables such as celery, lettuce and cucumber aren't good sources of fibre.

Nuts and seeds

- sesame, sunflower - all kinds (some nuts are also high in fat - see the *Fat & Cholesterol* Fact Card).

Fruit

- all fruit, especially with skin, seeds, pith
- dried fruit
- apples, apricots, bananas, pears, plums, oranges and berries are particularly high in fibre
- fruit juices don't provide as much fibre as eating the whole fruit.

As fibre absorbs water, it's important to make sure you drink enough fluids. Around 6-8 glasses a day is ideal for most people (check with your doctor first if you have kidney or heart problems).

FIBRE SUPPLEMENTS

Fibre supplements are a convenient and easy way to increase fibre intake. Fibre supplements may also produce less wind.

Bran fibre supplements are like unprocessed bran but are easier to eat. However, they may not provide enough fibre.

Psyllium (e.g. in *Nucolox*, *Agiofibe*, *Fybogel*, *Metamucil*) and **Sterculia** (e.g. in *Granocol*, *Normacol Plus*) are the two most common ingredients of fibre supplements. They:

- usually have less side effects than unprocessed bran
- may be fermented by bacteria in the bowel, producing protective short chain fatty acids
- should be taken with adequate fluid

Some supplements (e.g. *Nucolox*) also contain resistant starch, which may further protect against bowel cancer.

Recommended reading

Dietary Fibre and Good Health
The Gut Foundation, 1998

Other relevant Fact Cards

• *Haemorrhoids* • *Constipation* • *Irritable Bowel Syndrome*

Contact

Your doctor - listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

World Wide Web sites:

Gastroenterological Society of Australia - www.gesa.org.au
The Gut Foundation - www.gut.nsw.edu.au

Dietitians Association - listed under 'D' in the white pages of your capital city phone book.

Dietitians at your local hospital - listed under 'Hospitals' in the white pages of the phone book.

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist



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