

Fibre – Fact sheet

What is fibre?

Fibre is an essential part of a healthy diet. Fibre is a type of complex carbohydrate that is found in many plant-based, carbohydrate-rich foods, such as wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables, grains and pulses.

Fibre doesn't get broken down and absorbed in your small bowel like other types of food. Instead, it passes undigested into your large bowel.

DIAGRAM OF DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

There are two different types of fibre – soluble and insoluble.

The terms soluble and insoluble refer to whether the fibre dissolves in your small bowel. Soluble fibre includes pectins and beta glucans (found in foods like fruit and oats) and insoluble fibre includes cellulose (found in wholegrains and nuts). Actually, most food that is high in fibre has a mixture of both types.

Why do I need it?

Fibre helps to keep your digestive system in good working order and has many other important health benefits such as lowering risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. But many of us aren't getting enough....

Here we explain why you need fibre and give you some tips for getting more of it into your diet.

What are the health benefits of fibre?

Fibre is important for your digestive health. It helps to bulk up the stools in your large bowel and move it along your digestive tract more quickly, helping to prevent constipation. Fibre also makes your stools softer, which helps with this process.

There's also good evidence that fibre can help to reduce your risk of the following serious diseases:

- ♥ Bowel Cancer
- ♥ Heart Disease and Stroke
- ♥ Type 2 Diabetes

How much fibre do we need?

It's recommended that adults should have 30g of fibre a day. Children need less than this.

- ♥ 2-5 years - 15g
- ♥ 5-11 years - 20g
- ♥ 11-16 years - 25g
- ♥ 16-18 years - 30g
- ♥ Adults aged 18 and above - 30g

Many people are currently eating less than half the recommended amount of fibre. Eating a healthy, balanced diet including plenty of wholegrain, starchy foods and fruit and vegetables can help you to get enough fibre.



How do I add more fibre to my diet?

Pulses, Fruits and Vegetables

- ♥ Pulses such as beans, lentils and chickpeas. Add beans and extra veg to dishes such as curries, soups, stews and chilli.
- ♥ Fruit. Add it to your breakfast cereal or to plain yoghurt. This will help you to reach your 5-a-day target, as well as increase your fibre intake.
- ♥ Vegetables. Include some with each meal, or to snacks.
- ♥ Dried fruit. Include with breakfast, for instance homemade muesli.
- ♥ Nuts and seeds. Add as a topping on plain yoghurt for a fibre boost.
- ♥ Opt for chopped-up veg, fruit, dried fruit or nuts and seeds for snacks between meals.
- ♥ Starchy carbohydrates (ideally wholegrain whenever possible and leave the skin on the potatoes) such as wholemeal and wholegrain breads, cereals and pasta.
- ♥ Choose wholegrain foods, such as bread, cereals and pasta rather than white or refined starchy foods. Wholegrain foods contain more fibre.
- ♥ Quinoa, whole wheat couscous, brown or wild rice are fibre rich options.
- ♥ Check food labels when you're shopping to see which products are high in fibre.

If you don't currently eat enough fibre and need to up your fibre intake, it's best to do it gradually, to allow your gut to adjust. Increasing it too quickly may cause symptoms such as bloating and gas. It's a good idea to make sure you're drinking enough fluids too.

Fibre and good bacteria

Research has increasingly shown how important the bacteria in our gut may be to our health, and it has been suggested that a fibre rich diet can help increase the good bacteria in the gut.

Some fibre types provide a food source for 'friendly' gut bacteria helping them to increase and produce substances which are thought to be protective such as short-chain fatty acids.

What does 30g of Fibre look like?

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
|  Breakfast |  2 Weetabix 3.8g fibre |  An apple 2.4g fibre | Snack  Small bag of popcorn 1.3g fibre |
| |  Tuna mayo on oatmeal bread 3.9g fibre |  Handful of mixed nuts 2.2g fibre | Snack  80g fresh raspberries 5.2g fibre |
| |  Wholewheat spaghetti 7g fibre |  Tomato & basil sauce 1.6g fibre | Snack  30g dried mango 2.8g fibre |
| = 30.2g fibre | | | |

A healthy diet contains a mix of both soluble and insoluble fibre. While many fibre supplements exist, most do not contain the additional vitamins and minerals including vitamin B and iron, found in fibre rich foods. Supplements may also not be as easily or fully absorbed by the body. There's no substitute for good food.