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Increasing the amount of fibre in your diet

This information sheet is designed to help you increase the amount of fibre in your diet. It explains why you should eat more fibre, foods that are high in fibre and how much you should aim to have each day. If you have any concerns, please speak to a member of staff looking after you or your GP or nurse specialist, who will be happy to help.

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What is fibre and why should I eat it?

Fibre, or roughage, refers to the parts of fruit, vegetables and grains that cannot be digested by your stomach. It does not contain any calories, minerals or vitamins, but is important as part of a balanced diet because it:

- helps the muscles in your bowels (large and small intestines) to work properly. These muscles move stool (undigested food or 'poo') through your body;
- adds bulk to, and softens your stool by holding water. This can help to prevent or relieve constipation;
- promotes the growth of healthy bacteria in your bowels; and
- can relieve other problems such as haemorrhoids or piles (swollen blood vessels in your back passage), diverticulitis and irritable bowel syndrome (disorders of the bowel).

There is also evidence that eating a diet high in fibre can help to lower your cholesterol. This is a chemical that is made in the liver from the fatty foods that you eat. High levels of cholesterol are linked blood circulation problems. A high-fibre diet may possibly reduce the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer, such as bowel cancer.

There are two types of fibre:

- **soluble** (able to dissolve) - This type of fibre is broken down by the natural bacteria in your bowels, making your stool softer and larger. Foods that contain soluble fibre include oats, barley, pulses (for example peas and beans) and fruits and vegetables; and
- **insoluble** (does not dissolve) - This type of fibre passes through your body mostly unchanged, but it does absorb water. This increases the size of your stool so it passes through your bowels quicker. Foods with insoluble fibre include fruit and vegetables with skins and pips, nuts and wholegrain cereals such as wheat, rye and rice.

Fruit and vegetables usually contain a mixture of soluble and insoluble fibre.

Parkinson's disease Society- provides support and advice for people with Bowel and bladder problems and has a network of local groups.

t: 020 7931 8080 **f:** 020 7233 9908

e: e.enquiries @parkinsons.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS.

Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or;

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's

e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC) – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Language support services – If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Direct – Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 0845 4647 **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Choices – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

branflakes and let your body adjust before making any other changes. This will help to avoid or reduce any problems.

3. Make sure you drink more fluids as you increase the amount of fibre you have, as fibre absorbs fluid. Try to drink two litres (about three and a half pints or eight cups) daily of water and other water-based drinks such as fruit teas and squashes.
4. Eating regular meals will help you to develop a more regular bowel habit. Always have breakfast to help get your bowels moving in the morning.
5. Keep active – exercise helps your food to move through your bowels.

We don't recommend adding raw bran to food, as it reduces the absorption of some minerals such as iron and calcium. It is much better to get fibre from food you are already eating.

If you have any concerns about increasing the amount of fibre you eat or changing your diet, please speak to your doctor.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Carlene Igbedioh or Monica Lyons (Continence Nurse Specialists) or call your GP.

Carlene is available on 020 7188 2083 (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays) or 0207 188 2093 (Tuesdays).

Monica is available on 0207 188 4192.

Useful sources of information

Incontact - Provides support and advice for people with bowel and bladder problems and has a network of local groups. **t:** 0870 770 3246 **e:** info@incontact.org

The Bladder and Bowel Foundation - offers advice and assistance over the phone from specially trained nurses **t:** 0845 345 0165 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am-1pm) **e:** info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org **w:** www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

How can I increase the amount of fibre I eat?

Instead of...	Try...
White bread	Wholemeal, granary or oatmeal bread, wholemeal pitta bread.
Rice or corn-based cereals	Bran or wholegrain cereals such as muesli, porridge or bran flakes.
White rice and pasta	Wholegrain or brown rice, wholewheat pasta. There are now many quick cook varieties. You could use half white rice and half wholemeal at first so you get used to the taste.
Snacks such as cakes, biscuits, cream crackers, rice cakes	Wholemeal crackers, rye crispbreads, oatcakes, flapjacks, nuts and dried fruit (in moderation).

If you find wholegrains and nuts hard to chew, you may find cooked or tinned fruit and vegetables easier to eat. These are explained further below.

Try to eat more...

Fruit and vegetables.

You should try to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. This will help you reach the recommended fibre intake, as well as providing you with lots of vitamins and minerals. Fruit and vegetables that are high in fibre include:

apples	figs
beans	fruit juices
berries	green peas
broccoli	oranges
brussel sprouts	pears
carrots	prunes
cauliflower	

Tinned, frozen or dried fruit and vegetables all count and they don't have to be eaten on their own, for example vegetables used in soups, sandwiches or as pizza toppings all count towards your five a day. Although you can eat potatoes to increase your fibre, they don't count towards your five a day, as they are considered a starchy food, like pasta and rice.

Pulses, beans and lentils

These include split peas, chick peas, kidney beans, and green lentils. They are a good source of protein as well as fibre and can replace or be eaten with meat for many dishes.

What counts as a portion?

Food type	Examples of one portion - equivalent to 80g (as eaten, as an edible portion or drained if canned).
Fruit	One portion =
Large	Half a grapefruit, one slice of papaya, one (two inch) slice of melon
Medium	One apple, banana, pear, orange
Small	Two plums, satsumas or kiwi fruit, three apricots, or seven strawberries
Dried	One tablespoon of raisins, currants or sultanas, two figs, or three prunes
Fruit or vegetable juice or smoothie	One glass (150ml) of 100% juice

Vegetables	One portion =
Cooked, frozen or tinned vegetables	Three heaped tablespoons (large spoons) of vegetables such as carrots, peas, sweetcorn
Salad vegetables	Three sticks of celery, a two inch piece of cucumber, one medium tomato, seven cherry tomatoes
Pulses and beans (These only count as one portion no matter how much you eat)	Three heaped tablespoons, such as kidney beans, butter beans or chick peas

How much fibre should I eat?

On average, most people in the UK only eat about 12 grams of fibre per day. The recommended daily amount is 18 grams per day. Pre-packed foods should all state the amount of fibre they contain on the label. Compare brands of products to see which one provides the most fibre. Some products may have less fibre than you think.

The fibre content of fruit and vegetables can vary, but the table below gives you a rough guide:

Fruit/vegetable (per portion)	Amount of fibre (g)
Kidney beans	5
A pear	3.5
Peas (boiled)	3.5
A banana	2
An apple (with skin)	2
Carrots	2

Tips for increasing your fibre

1. Gradually increase the fibre in your diet. Do not have large amounts of fibre one day and little the next.
2. If you suddenly increase the amount of fibre you eat, you may pass more wind, feel bloated or have stomach cramps. Make one change at a time, for example try swapping cornflakes for