

# Fibre

## General Information

Fibre is an essential part of a healthy, balanced diet. Increasing the fibre in your diet can help prevent constipation and diverticular disease (small pouches in the gut which become inflamed and cause abdominal pain). It can help your digestive system to process food and absorb nutrients. Fibre makes you feel fuller and so helps to control your appetite.

Fibre (roughage) is found in plants and there are two main types: – **soluble** and **insoluble**

**Soluble** fibre can be digested by your body. It is broken down in the colon (large bowel) by bacteria. Stools become bulky, because of the increased bacterial mass of the stool. It dissolves in water to form a gel like substance which can bind to other substances in the gut and slows down digestion and movement of food through the system. This also increases the stool bulk and thickens the consistency. It can lower cholesterol levels and controls blood sugar. It can be found in all fruits, vegetables and oatmeal. Too much soluble fibre, however, can cause loose stools.

**Insoluble fibre** (“gut healthy fibre”) is not digested by the body but absorbs water very effectively (up to 15 times its weight in water) and thus contributes to an increase in stool weight. Insoluble fibre does not dissolve in water, so passes through the gut relatively intact, speeding up the passage of food and waste products, which is why it is often referred to as ‘nature’s broom’. It has been proved to have many protective effects on the gut from diseases like cancer, Crohn’s disease and many others.

## Constipation

Constipation is one of the most common digestive complaints.  
Most cases of constipation are caused by one or more of the following:

- Lack of fibre
- Lack of fluid
- Lack of exercise
- Ignoring the urge to go to the toilet
- Stress

## How much Fibre?

A balance of both forms of fibre should be included in your diet. Some foods contain soluble and insoluble fibre. The recommended average daily intake is 18-21 grams per day for an adult. The average person in the UK only eats approximately 12 grams per day.

## How to increase Fibre

If you are increasing your intake of fibre it is important to increase it gradually. A sudden increase can make you produce more wind, leaving you feeling bloated and cause stomach cramps. Gradually increase your intake of fibre over a 3-5 day period. Remember the way the body reacts to dietary fibre is very individual (what can bulk up some people will loosen others). It may take some time to find an acceptable diet that improves the function of your bowel.

## Fluids

It is important to drink enough liquid on a higher fibre diet as fibre absorbs water (6-8 large glasses of fluid a day).

## Predominantly Insoluble Fibre

Food Type	Portion Size	Fibre content (g)
<b>Breakfast Cereals</b>		
All Bran	Medium portion (40g)	10
Shredded Wheat	2 biscuits	6
Bran Flakes	30g	4.5
Weetabix	2 biscuits	4.5
Sultana Bran	40g	4
Muesli, Fruit & Fibre, Shreddies	40g	3.5
Cornflakes, Special K	30g	0.5
Porridge (cooked)	160g	1.3
Ready Brek	160g	2.2
<b>Bread</b>		
White Bread	2 slices	1.5
Brown Bread	2 slices	3
Wholemeal Bread	2 slices	4.2
Wheatgerm Bread	2 slices	2.6
High Bran Bread	1 small	3
Pitta Bread	1	1
Granary Bread	2 slices	2.6
Ryvita	2 pieces	2.4
Wholemeal crackers	3 biscuits	1
Wholemeal pitta	1	5
Digestives	1	0.4
Oatcakes	3	1.4
<b>Pasta &amp; Rice</b>		
Whole wheat/Brown Pasta	220g cooked	8
White Pasta	220g cooked	2.6
Pearl Barley	150g cooked	3
Brown Rice	180g cooked	1.4
White Rice	180g cooked	0.2
<b>Nuts</b>		
Almonds, coconut, hazelnuts, peanuts	Small bag (30g)	2
Peanut butter	Thick spread on bread (30g)	1
Brazil nuts, walnuts	Approx 9 nuts	1

## Predominately Soluble Fibre

Food Type	Portion size	Fibre content (g)
<b>Fruit</b>		
Apricots, dried	6	4
Apples, Nectarines, Peaches	1 medium	2
Orange	1 medium	3
Prunes	4	2
Banana	1 medium	4
Grapes	100g	0.7
Sultanas	2 tablespoons	1
Dates (dried)	2	1
Fig (dried)	3	10
Strawberries/raspberries	150g	4
Blueberries	150g	2.5
pear	1 medium	5
<b>Fruit (cooked)</b>		
Blackcurrants	150g	4
Gooseberries	150g	3
Plums, rhubarb	150g	2
Avocado	½ small	3.4
<b>Vegetables</b>		
New potatoes	175g	2.6
Jacket pots (with skin)	180g	4.9
Brussel sprouts	90g	2.4
French Beans	90g	3.7
Peas	70g	3.6
Cauliflower	90g	1.4
Broccoli	85g	2
Carrots	80g	2
Spinach	90g	1.9
Tomatoes	85g	0.85
Sweet corn	85g	1.2
<b>Pulses</b>		
Baked beans	30g	2.8
Chickpeas, boiled	30g	5
Butter beans	30g	2.8
Split peas	30g	3.4
Boiled beans	30g	4

### What can I do to make my motions firmer?

Reduce fluids.

Reduce caffeine.

Reduce soluble fibre or aim for low scoring soluble fibre.

Increase insoluble fibre especially high scoring insoluble fibre.

### What can I do to make my motions softer?

Increase fluids.

Increase soluble fibre.

Reduce insoluble fibre.

## References

[www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Adults: Diagnosis and Management of Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Primary Care. NICE clinical guidance 61 (2008). Available from: [www.nice.org.uk/CG061](http://www.nice.org.uk/CG061)

## Contact details

### Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy

(01202) 442506

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an Information Prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre  
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
Longfleet Road  
Poole  
Dorset  
BH15 2JB  
Telephone: 01202 448003

[www.poole.nhs.uk](http://www.poole.nhs.uk)

Author: Philippa Irvine

Date:

Review date:

Version number: to be applied by Patient Information Team

Ward sister/head of department: Sally Sheppard

The Information Standard logo to be inserted here on final copy of leaflet. Your leaflet cannot be given to patients until this logo has been inserted. The logo can **only** be applied by the Patient Information Team.

**We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01202 448499, text 07758 272495 or email [pals@poole.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@poole.nhs.uk) for advice.**

**If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Information Team confidentially: phone 01202 448003, write to the Health Information Centre (address above), or email [patient.information@poole.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@poole.nhs.uk).**