

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics

Dietary Advice for Diarrhoea

What is diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea is when you have watery, loose bowel movements that occur more than three times per day. Diarrhoea is a common problem. After a few days, the symptoms of diarrhoea usually settle down. Most of the time, diarrhoea is treated simply by replacing lost fluids and salts. However, longer lasting or chronic diarrhoea, where symptoms last for more than three days, may be a part of another problem. In this case, see your doctor so you can find out what may be the cause of your diarrhoea.

Can changing my diet help with diarrhoea?

For some people, altering their fibre intake can help to relieve diarrhoea by thickening the stools and slowing passage of stools through the bowel. However, unfortunately dietary modification may not always be successful. If you decide to make a dietary change, it is advisable to do this for a minimum of four weeks before re-assessing your symptoms.

What is fibre?

Dietary fibre is a type of carbohydrate that is not easily digested or absorbed by the body. Often it may be described as 'roughage' in the diet. There are two main types of fibre, namely **soluble** and **insoluble** fibre.

It is advisable to eliminate all high-fibre foods from your diet for **four weeks**. This may help reduce the amount of stool you pass, and possibly help firm up your stools. Following this initial dietary change, if your bowels have responded well, it may be worthwhile to gradually reintroduce sources of **soluble fibre** in your diet. This may help to further improve your bowel habit.

If the introduction of soluble fibre worsens your symptoms, it may be appropriate to continue on a strict low-fibre diet. Please consult your GP in this case for further advice.

If after a trial of a low-fibre diet for at least four weeks, you do not notice any improvement in your symptoms, it is unlikely that further dietary modification will be beneficial. In this case, revert to your usual diet and consult your GP for further advice.

The following table is a guide to help you follow a diet low in both **soluble** and **insoluble** fibre. If you choose to follow a low-fibre diet (for at least four weeks), it is sometimes helpful to keep a symptom/bowel diary whilst you make these dietary changes. This can help you evaluate if there has been any symptom improvement.

Table 1: low fibre diet

| FOODS TO INCLUDE | FOODS TO AVOID |
|--|--|
| <i>Bread, cereal and nuts</i> | <i>Bread, cereal and nuts</i> |
| White flour and baked products made with white flour such as English muffins, crumpets, plain scones and bagels, pancakes, white pitta bread, plain naan bread, plain chapatti, poppadoms and pastry made with white flour | Wholemeal, brown, granary, bran, and rye flours and breads Foods made with these flours Fibre-enriched white breads e.g. 50:50 |
| Refined breakfast cereals such as Special K, Cornflakes, Sugar Puffs, Coco Pops, and Rice Krispies | Wholegrain cereals, such as Weetabix, All Bran, porridge oats, muesli, bran, Grape-nuts and any cereal with added nuts / fruit |
| White rice, rice noodles, pasta, noodles and macaroni Couscous, tapioca, sago, corn flour | Brown rice (& rice noodles), pasta, couscous, bulgur wheat, wheat germ, pearl barley, quinoa, oatmeal and wholegrain noodles |
| Plain biscuits such as Rich Tea, Morning coffee, Marie, Chocolate chip, chocolate bourbons, custard creams, malted milk | Wholemeal biscuits e.g. Digestives, flapjacks, Hobnobs Biscuits containing dried fruit and/or nuts e.g. Fig rolls, Garibaldi |
| Plain crackers and crispbreads | Rye and whole grain crispbreads or crackers Oatcakes |
| Plain cake e.g. Victoria sponge, Madeira | Cakes with added fruit or nuts |
| <i>Fruit</i> | <i>Fruit</i> |
| Tinned peaches or fruit salad (avoid pineapple), fresh or tinned melon (except watermelon) | All other fruit |
| Fruit juices (no bits) | All dried fruit & dried coconut |
| Smooth coconut milk | Smoothies & fruit juices (with bits) |
| <i>Vegetables</i> | <i>Vegetables</i> |
| Well-cooked root vegetables (peeled/ skinned/ de-seeded/ no stalks wherever possible) such as carrots, sude, courgette, cauliflower, beetroot, marrow and potato | All other vegetables |
| Sieved tomato sauces, including passata and tomato puree | |
| Strained vegetable juices | |
| Blended / sieved soups | |
| <i>Meat and alternatives</i> | <i>Meat and alternatives</i> |
| All meats and fish | Meat or fish made with wholemeal pastry or breadcrumbs |
| Tofu | |
| Eggs | |

| FOODS TO INCLUDE | FOODS TO AVOID |
|--|--|
| <i>Milk and milk products</i> | <i>Milk and milk products</i> |
| Milk (all types), cream, sour cream, crème fraiche, fromage frais, smooth yoghurt, cheese | Any milk products containing fruits, nuts, seeds or cereals e.g. Wensleydale cheese Yoghurts with added fibre (includes Inulin, FOS or prebiotics) |
| <i>Desserts</i> | <i>Desserts</i> |
| Custard, ice cream, milk puddings, mousses, blancmange, sorbet | All desserts containing fruit and/ or nuts e.g. sticky toffee pudding made with dates |
| Clear jelly | |
| Plain cakes and sponges | |
| <i>Drinks</i> | <i>Drinks</i> |
| Fruit and vegetable juices (no 'bits'), milk, water, tea and coffee, herbal tea, ovaltine, Horlicks, cocoa | Fruit and vegetable juices with bits |
| <i>Miscellaneous</i> | <i>Miscellaneous</i> |
| Smooth or sieved soup Sugar, honey, golden syrup, custard powder, boiled sweets, toffee, caramel, marshmallows, plain/milk/white chocolate Pepper, salt, herbs and spices in moderation (dried or finely chopped) Gravy, tomato sauce, soy sauce, plain crisps, plain pretzels (without sesame seeds) | Soup with pieces, such as Minestrone Jam or marmalade with skin, peel or pips Chocolate with dried fruit, nuts or seeds, and coconut Wholegrain mustard, pickles, Relish Humous, coleslaw, popcorn, corn chips Seeds, including pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds |

Useful Tips:

- Eat small meals at regular intervals (every three to four hours).
- Chew food slowly and thoroughly.
- Avoid food that is too hot or too cold.
- Avoid large quantities of caffeine or alcohol as these may worsen your symptoms.
- Avoid rich sauces and spicy foods if they worsen your symptoms.
- Avoid fizzy drinks if they worsen your symptoms.
- Avoid chewing gum / sugar free mints and sweets (containing sorbitol or xylitol which may have a laxative effect)

Soluble fibre reintroductions

Having followed a strict low-fibre diet for four weeks, if you have experienced symptom improvement you may wish to introduce some sources of **soluble** dietary fibre. Soluble fibre may help further improve your bowel habit by slowing down your bowel. Soluble fibre dissolves in water and forms a thick gel in our digestive tract. This can help to slow gut transit time and help you feel fuller for longer.

Reintroduction One

Try including oats in your diet, e.g. as porridge, oatcakes or flapjack

Suggested portion sizes = 30-50g / ⅓ – ½ cup oats for porridge; 2-4 oatcakes; small square of flapjack

Reintroduction Two

Try adding golden linseeds / flaxseeds into your diet

Suggested portion size = 15-30g / 1-2 tbsp.

Reintroduction Three

Try adding an additional portion of low fibre fruit and vegetables per day (excluding fruit juices)

Reintroduction Four

Try adding smooth hummus into your diet

Suggested portion size = 60g / 2 tbsp.

Reintroduction Five

Try adding smooth peanut / other nut butter into your diet

Suggested portion size = 15-30g / 1-2 level tbsp.

FURTHER ADVICE

- It is advisable to try only one soluble fibre reintroduction at a time
- Maintain this reintroduction for at least three days before evaluating your symptoms
 - x If your diarrhoea worsens, revert to the strict low-fibre diet and seek advice from your GP
 - ✓ If your diarrhoea remains settled or your symptoms improve further, continue onto the next reintroduction
- Ensure you are drinking plenty of decaffeinated, non-fizzy drinks. This will help you get maximum benefit from any soluble fibre you reintroduce. Aim for 8-10 cups per day.

Upon completing the soluble fibre reintroductions, if you are concerned about the nutritional balance of your diet, please consult your GP.

Following a restricted diet to manage your symptoms may result in a diet low in certain vitamins and minerals. Nutritional assessment by a Registered Dietitian may be beneficial.