

## Department of Nutrition & Dietetics

# Dietary Advice for Constipation

### ***What is constipation?***

If your bowel movements or stools are hard and difficult to pass you may be constipated. Constipation can cause stomach pain, bloating and/or a feeling that your bowels have not completely emptied after a movement.

How often you have a bowel movement usually does not matter. Fewer bowel movements does not mean you are constipated as long as they are soft, pain-free and follow your usual pattern. The key is to watch whether there is a change in your bowel habit. Everyone is different but if you are having fewer than usual, you may be constipated.

### ***What are common causes of constipation?***

- A diet that is low in fibre-rich foods
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Limited daily physical activity
- Not going to the bathroom when you feel the urge
- Change in your daily routine such as travelling
- Side effects from iron or calcium supplements and some medications

### ***Can changing my diet help with constipation?***

Eating a diet rich in a variety of fibre-containing foods can help prevent and manage constipation. It is important to drink plenty of caffeine-free, non-fizzy fluids to allow fibre to do its job. Aim for 8-10 cups per day.

### ***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. Eating a mixture of soluble and insoluble sources of dietary fibre will help promote a more regular and comfortable bowel movement. Insoluble

fibre can be particularly useful in adding bulk and softening your stools, thus making your time on the toilet less troublesome.

### ***How much fibre do I need?***

The UK recommended intake for dietary fibre is **30g per day**.

### ***How can I increase my intake of dietary fibre?***

- Opt for wholegrain varieties instead of white or refined varieties e.g. Bran-flakes® instead of cornflakes. The same applies to flours; try to use wholewheat flour in baking/cooking at home.
- Try to keep the skin on fruits, vegetables and potatoes. Try to meet your '5-a-day' target.
- Use pulses e.g. lentils and beans to bulk up dishes such as curries, chilli or soups. You can also try to add extra vegetables into casseroles, bolognese or stew.
- Frozen and/or canned varieties of fruit and vegetables are still a good source of fibre.

**Remember it is important to introduce fibre-containing foods gradually (i.e. one extra portion / new food per day) and ensure that you drink plenty of fluid.**

**Table 1: Sources of soluble & insoluble fibre\***

Type of food	Total fibre per 100g	Typical portion size	Fibre per portion	Soluble	Insoluble
<i>Cereals and breads</i>					
Wheat biscuit	9.7g	40g	3.9g		√
Fibre-flakes / bran cereals	13 – 24.5g	30-40g	3.9-9.8g		√
Porridge	10-11g	30g	3-3.3g	√	
Muesli (Swiss-style)	6.4g	50g	3.2g	√	√
Brown bread	3.5g	40g	1.4g		√
Wholemeal bread	5.0g	40g	2.0g		√
Granary bread	3.3g	40g	1.3g		√
Malted-fruit bread	2.6g	30g	0.8g		√
Brown rice (boiled)	0.8g	100g	0.8g		√
Wholemeal spaghetti (boiled)	3.5g	150g	5.3g		√
<i>Fruit and Vegetables (with skin / peel)</i>					
Apples	1.8g	80g	1.4g	√	√
Apricots	6.3g	80g	5.0g	√	√
Banana	1.1g	80g	0.9g	√ <sub>(ripe)</sub>	√
Blackberries	3.1g	80g	2.5g	√	√
Dried mixed fruit	2.2g	25-30g	0.6-0.7g	√	√
Avocado	3.4g	80g	2.7g	√	
Broccoli (boiled)	2.3g	80g	1.8g	√	√
Carrots (boiled)	2.5g	80g	2.0g	√	
Parsnip (boiled)	4.7g	80g	3.8g	√	
New potatoes (boiled including skin)	1.1g	80-100g	0.9-1.1g	√	
Old potatoes (baked including skin)	2.7g	80-100g	2.2-2.7g	√	√
<i>Nuts and seeds</i>					
Almonds	7.4g	25-30g	1.9-2.2g		√
Brazil nuts	4.3g	25-30g	1.1-1.3g		√
Cashew nuts	3.2g	25-30g	0.8-1.0g		√
Peanuts	6.4g	25-30g	1.6-1.9g		√
Hazelnuts	6.5g	25-30g	1.6-1.9g		√
Sesame seeds	7.9g	12g	0.9g		√
Sunflower seeds	6.0g	16g	1.0g		√
Chia seeds	34-35g	15-30g	5.1-10.5g		√
Flaxseeds / golden linseeds	27-28g	15-30g	4.1-8.4g	√	
<i>Peas &amp; Beans</i>					
Peas (boiled)	4.5g	80g	3.6g	√	√
Baked beans	3.7g	200g	7.4g	√	√
Broad beans (boiled)	6.5g	80g	5.2g	√	√
Butter beans (canned)	4.6g	80g	3.7g	√	√
Chickpeas (boiled)	4.3g	80g	3.4g	√	√
Green beans (boiled)	4.1g	80g	3.3g	√	√
Red kidney beans (canned)	6.2g	80g	5.0g	√	√

\* Adapted from BDA Food Fact Sheet 'Fibre' 2016

