

Fibre after bowel cancer

In a balanced diet, fibre is essential to our digestive system. It provides the bulk in our poo. It helps to keep everything moving smoothly through the bowel by absorbing and carrying the unwanted waste out of the body. Fibre helps to maintain a regular, easy pattern of bowel movements.

Fibre can be soluble or insoluble.

As a general rule, **soluble fibre** is easier for the gut to digest. It is broken down by bacteria in the gut and increases the size of your poo. The soluble fibre thickens and becomes sticky, gummy and gel-like so that it also helps to protect the lining of the bowel.

Insoluble fibre in the diet can't be digested by the body, but it adds important extra bulk to poo in a healthy digestive system. It can also ferment in the bowel, producing gas (wind) which can sometimes also cause cramping.



Soluble fibre sources

Examples include

oats, barley, berries, apples, celery, carrots, cucumber, beans, peas, lentils and chickpeas.



Insoluble fibre sources

Sources of insoluble fibre are found in grain and from the skins and leaves of plants, vegetables and fruits. Examples include

beans, wheat, brown rice, root vegetable skins, seeds and nuts.



Fibre

The benefits of fibre in your diet

Eating high fibre foods may help you feel full for a longer time. This can help control your appetite and manage your weight.

For people recovering from bowel cancer, soluble fibre can help slow down the digestion of food and absorb more water in the bowels, keeping poo soft and helping to avoid constipation.



It can also help to:

- » Lower blood cholesterol levels
- » Control blood sugar (glucose) levels. This is helpful if you have diabetes or if you sometimes get a low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia)
- » Manage diarrhoea and loose stools
- » Soluble fibre may help to reduce some of the symptoms of diarrhoea, wind and cramping pains
- » Have a healthier bowel by providing nutrients to increase the amount of healthy bacteria in your gut

How much fibre?

The advice you are given about fibre will depend on the treatment you have had.

You may be concerned after bowel surgery about eating a healthy diet rich in fruit and vegetables whilst needing to keep fibre levels at a minimum. The table below outlines which fruits and vegetables have higher and lower fibre content.

	Higher	Lower
Fruit	Dried apricots, figs, avocados, blackberries, dates, prunes, raspberries, sultanas, pears, apples, peaches	Bananas, grapes, melon, pineapple, strawberries
Vegetables	Baked potatoes, peas, broccoli, sprouts, aubergines, parsnips, greens	New potatoes, pumpkin, courgette, cucumber, lettuce, tomatoes
Beans	All types of beans, chickpeas, lentils	Beansprouts
Nuts	Coconut, peanuts, pistachios, almonds, brazils, sunflower seeds	Pine nuts
Cereal products	Bran cereals, wholegrain wheat cereals, porridge, wholemeal pasta, granary bread, rye crispbread, brown rice	White rice, white pasta, white bread, corn flakes, rice crispies

tips

Making the most of fibre in the diet

- 1** Your body needs a lot of water to be able to digest your food, and particularly the fibre in your diet. Liquids help you to chew your food properly, breaking down fibre to start off a good digestive process. Fibre absorbs water, so it is important to drink fluids if eating a high fibre diet
- 2** In a balanced diet, you will be eating some sources of fibre at every meal so it is worth thinking about how you can increase the amount of liquids in your food at the same time – e.g. smoothies, soups and broths, casseroles and stews, fruit yoghurts, etc
- 3** Most healthy adults need two litres of fluid from their food and drinks every day – this can come from all your drink and food sources and does not mean you have to drink two litres of water a day. Signs that you need to drink more include headaches, dizziness, dry mouth and dark urine



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