

Food Fact Sheet: Fibre

Fibre is an essential nutrient for the normal functioning of the gut. It is related to a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.

Most of us need to eat more fibre and having a very good intake from a wide variety of foods is linked to a better overall nutritional intake.

What is fibre?

Dietary fibre is the edible parts of plants resistant to digestion and absorption in the small intestine. It is completely or partially broken down by bacteria in the large intestine. Fibre includes carbohydrates called polysaccharides and oligosaccharides, plus lignin.

The many health benefits of fibre are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:
Health benefits of fibre

Why increase your fibre intake	High fibre foods to eat
To lower your risk of heart disease, diabetes and colorectal cancer.	All foods high in fibre, in particular cereals and wholegrains
To treat or prevent constipation, make stools softer and easier to pass.	All foods high in fibre, in particular wheat and other cereals
To help lower a high blood cholesterol level or high blood pressure.	Oat bran

Some of the best food choices for fibre are:

- starchy foods: porridge, oat bran, high fibre breakfast cereals, sweet potato, potato with skin, wholemeal or wholegrain bread and pasta (see our Food Fact sheet on Wholegrains)
- beans and pulses such as baked beans, hummus and dahl
- vegetables: peas, parsnip, mixed veg (from frozen), green beans, carrot, canned sweetcorn and broccoli
- fruits: pear, apple, raspberries and blackberries, plums and prunes, banana and orange
- seeds such as linseeds and chia seeds
- nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts and peanut butter.

When you read food labels check for the grams of fibre per serving or 100 g. A food product is: 'high fibre' if it contains at least 6g of fibre per 100g a 'source of fibre' if it contains at least 3g of fibre per 100g.

How much fibre do you eat?

In the UK, the average fibre intake for adults is 60% (18g) of what it should be (30g). Overall for children, those at primary school age should try to eat 5g more a day, whilst those secondary school aged should try to eat 9g more. For adults, dietary fibre intake should increase to 30g a day, as part of a healthy balanced diet.

Table 2:

Age Group	Amount of recommended fibre (grams per day)
Children (2-5 years)	15g
Children (5-11 years)	20g
Children (11-16 years)	25g
Adolescents (16-18 years)	30g
Adults	30g

How much fibre should I have?

Type of food	Total fibre per 100g
Cereals and Carbohydrates	
Fibre flake/Bran cereals	13-24.5g
Wholemeal bread (2 slices)	5.0g
Brown rice (boiled)	0.8g
Wholemeal spaghetti (boiled)	3.5g
Fruit and Vegetables	
Apple	1.8g
Banana	1.1g
Broccoli (boiled)	2.3g
Carrots (boiled)	2.5g
Nuts and seeds	
Almonds	7.4g
Peanuts	6.4g
Sunflower seeds	6.0g
Peas and beans	
Peas (boiled)	4.5g
Baked Beans (in tomato sauce)	3.7g
Chick peas (boiled)	4.3g

Tips on how to increase your fibre

- Have a high-fibre cereal at breakfast.
- Add fruit to breakfast cereal.
- Have an oat-based cereal bar as a snack (*be aware of sugar content - check the label)
- Mix linseeds into yogurt.
- Have a wholemeal sandwich at lunch with carrot sticks and hummus.
- Try a homemade vegetable soup with rye bread?
- Have wholemeal pasta with vegetables at dinner time.
- Add pulses such as baked beans and lentils to dishes.
- Add extra vegetables to sauces such as bolognese, curry and chilli.
- Keep a supply of frozen vegetables so you are never without!
- Leave the skin on vegetables and fruit and aim to have 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Have fresh fruit as a snack.
- Blend together some fruit and milk/yogurt for a refreshing smoothie.
- Other snack ideas include an oat-based cereal bar, trail mix, popcorn or a slice of wholemeal toast.

An example of foods to choose to provide you with the recommended 'at least 30g of fibre' in a day (for an adult)

Breakfast	Portion size	Fibre per portion (g)
Porridge	50g	5g
with raspberries	80g	2.5g
Snack		
1 banana or apple	1 medium sized	2g
Lunch		
Baked Potato	180g - medium cooked	5g
Baked Beans	80g	3g
Sweetcorn (tinned)	80g	2g

Dinner		
Wholemeal Spaghetti	150g	5g
Suggestion: add a tomato based sauce and vegetables		
Snack		
Wholemeal Bread	2 slices	6g
Peanut Butter	1 Tablespoon	1g
TOTAL		31.5g

If you need further help, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.

Summary

Remember to increase your fibre intake gradually to avoid gastrointestinal symptoms such as bloating and gas and allow your gut to adjust to the higher intake. Remember to drink plenty of fluid, to allow the fibre to do its job properly, aiming for 8-10 cups of fluid per day at regular intervals.