

First line advice: For patients with constipation

This information sheet has been provided to give you basic initial information about what to do if you are suffering from constipation. If you need more detailed advice and support, please ask your Doctor to refer you to a dietitian.

Constipation is a common problem, which can be defined as;

- less than three bowel motions a week
- feelings of incomplete bowel movement
- obstruction and straining
- passing small hard pellets

The key steps to tackling this problem are:

1. Increasing your dietary fibre intake.
2. Drink at least 8 glasses / cups of fluid daily (1.5 – 2 litres per day): water, diluted fruit juices, fruit squash, soups, herb or fruit teas, tea or coffee.
3. Increasing your activity levels,(e.g. Walk for 30 minutes, 3 times a week)

Gradually increasing your dietary fibre intake and maintaining this can help to relieve the symptoms and prevent further episodes of constipation. Dietary fibre cannot be broken down in the stomach and therefore reaches the large bowel and adds bulk to the stools, preventing constipation.

Below are a number of examples of high fibre foods:

Sources of fibre	Examples:
Cereals	Wholegrain cereals e.g. weetabix, muesli, branflakes, fruit and fibre, shredded wheat, albran and oats porridge.
Bread, flour and baked products	Wholemeal, granary bread, wholewheat biscuits, wholewheat crispbreads, fruit loaf
All fruits and vegetables	Bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, pears, etc. Broccoli, sweet corn, cabbage, tomatoes, lettuce.
Dried fruits, nuts, seeds	Currants, raisins, apricots, prunes, peanuts, almonds, sunflower seeds and golden linseeds.
Starchy foods and potatoes	Unpeeled , new potatoes in their skins and jacket potatoes. Brown rice. Wholewheat pasta
Beans, peas and pulses	Kidney beans, baked beans, lentils, chick peas, peas.

How to increase your fibre intake

- Select a wholegrain breakfast cereal
- Use wholemeal or granary bread
- Choose fresh fruit, dried fruit or nuts, as snacks
- Eat at least 5 portions of fruit, vegetable or salad a day.
- Try jacket potatoes, brown rice or wholemeal pasta at meals.
- Include peas, beans, lentils or pulses in main meals
- Include cooked vegetables or salad with meals..
- Bake / cook using wholemeal flour: wholemeal biscuits, scones, flapjacks and fruit loaf. (You can start with half wholemeal)

Prune juice is the only fruit juice with a significant amount of fibre, therefore it can be a useful addition to your fibre intake for the day.

Adding Bran to foods is not recommended as it interferes with the absorption of vitamins and minerals.

This information leaflet was produced by the Community Dietitians at The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Rd, Harrow, HA1 3UJ

This diet sheet is intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a Registered Dietitian. The advice is not appropriate for certain medical conditions such as diets that require the exclusion or restriction of particular foods. If in doubt, please check with your medical practitioner.

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