

What is fibre?

Fibre is the part of the food that cannot be digested by the body. It is found only in plant foods, particularly in skins, seeds and stalks of fruits and vegetables. It is also found in the bran (or outside layers) of cereal grains – wholegrain breads and cereals. There is no fibre in animal foods.

Why is fibre important?

Fibre is an important part of a healthy balanced diet. It helps to keep our bowel healthy and functioning properly. Children who eat a low fibre diet are at risk of constipation or poor bowel health.

What does fibre do?

Fibre is not just one substance - there are a number of different types of fibre found in food. You will often find more than one type of fibre in the same food.

Soluble fibre

Soluble fibre forms a gel when mixed with water, making your bowel contents more viscous. This will make food stay in the digestive tract for longer. This is important for people who suffer from diarrhoea. It is also beneficial to help lower blood cholesterol levels.

Soluble fibre is found in fruits such as apples, bananas, oranges, strawberries and grapefruit. It is also found in vegetables such as potatoes,

peas, beans, cabbage and cauliflower. It is also found in legumes such as lentils and other grains such as oats and barley.

Insoluble fibre

Insoluble fibre increases stool bulk, helping to improve bowel function and increase the rate at which contents travel through the bowel. This can help to relieve constipation.

It is found in wholegrain and wholemeal breads and cereals, pasta, nuts and seeds and the skins of fruit and vegetables.

How can I increase the fibre in my child's diet?

The following are some easy ways.

Breads and Cereals

Choose:

- > Wholemeal, wholegrain, multigrain varieties
- > Wholemeal muffins or crumpets
- > Wholemeal or wholegrain crackers
- > Wholemeal spaghetti, macaroni and brown rice.

Breakfast Cereals

Choose:

- > Wholegrain varieties eg Weetbix, Vitabrits, Shredded Wheat, Mini Wheats, Sultana Bran, Bran Flakes etc.
- > Porridge made with rolled oats is popular in winter.

Dried Peas, Beans and Lentils

- > Kidney beans, lima beans, soy beans, chick peas, brown lentils, baked beans are all good sources of fibre.
- > Use them in salads, soups and stews.

Fruit

- > Encourage fresh fruit (fruit juice is not a good source of fibre)
- > Where possible eat the skin of the fruit.
- > Dried fruit

Vegetables

- > Include plenty of fresh vegetables every day.
- > Try salads for a change from cooked vegetables.

Snacks

High fibre snacks could include:

- > Fresh and dried fruit
- > Wholemeal bread or toast
- > Wholemeal cracker biscuits
- > Home-made cake or biscuits with wholemeal flour and/or dried fruit.

Fluid

Dietary fibre absorbs water to help keep the stool soft and for this reason it is essential that children have enough fluid. It is important to encourage your child to drink plenty of fluid (mainly water) throughout the day.

Safe eating for younger children

Babies and young children are more likely to choke on their food. Young children do not have the back teeth to chew and grind lumps of food properly. Children aged 0-4 years are most at risk of choking on hard foods.

If young children run, play, laugh or cry while eating they are more likely to choke. Children should be encouraged to sit quietly while they eat and should never be force fed. Parents or caregivers should always watch young children carefully when they are eating.

Some foods should not be offered to children under 4 years because they can be unsafe:

- > Don't give foods that can break off into hard pieces. For example, avoid raw carrot sticks, celery sticks, apple pieces and whole grapes. These foods should be cut up, grated, cooked or mashed.
- > Tough skins on sausages and frankfurts should be removed. Sausages, frankfurts and other meats should be cut into small pieces.
- > Don't give popcorn, nuts, hard lollies or other similar foods to young children.

Consider doing a first aid course. This can give you the skills to help in a situation where your child is choking, or where other first aid care is needed.

Produced by

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High Fibre Diet

Information for
parents & carers