

# Low-fibre diet: what foods to eat and why

For people that have been asked to follow a low-fibre or low-residue diet

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## What is a low-fibre diet?

A low-fibre diet, also called a low-residue diet, means you eat less than 10-15 grams of fibre each day. Each serving of food you eat should have 2 grams of fibre or less.

Fibre is the part of fruits, vegetables, legumes (dried beans, peas, lentils), nuts, seeds, and grains that your body does not digest (break down). You may also hear fibre called “roughage.”

Fibre helps to:

- add bulk (size) to your stool (poo)
- absorb water to form a gel that holds your stool together
- move stool through your digestive tract (stomach and bowels).


## Why am I being asked to follow a low-fibre diet?

Your health-care team may ask you to follow a low-fibre diet if you have:

- surgery to your digestive tract
- have symptoms like abdominal (belly) pain, cramping, or diarrhea
- a flare-up from a digestive issue like Crohn’s or diverticular disease
- a bowel obstruction.

Too much fibre can make your stool bigger and harder to pass (get out). High-fibre foods can cause gas and discomfort if you are not used to eating fibre.

A low-fibre diet can help your body make less stool, so your digestive tract can rest and heal. You may be able to make your symptoms better if you follow a low-fibre diet.

 **The recommendations in this booklet are guidelines only. Everyone’s body is different. You may have to adjust which foods and how much you eat, to what feels good for you.**

## How do I know how much fibre is in a food?

Read the nutrition facts label on packaged and prepared foods to learn how much fibre is in a food.

The line “Fibre / Fibres” tells you how many grams of fibre is in a serving. You can choose to eat more or less food than the serving size (outlined in blue) but this will change how much fibre you are eating. Choose foods that have 2 grams or less of fibre in the serving you will eat.

Example: If you eat four crackers from package A, you will get 1 gram of fibre. If you eat 14 crackers from package B you will get 3 grams of fibre. Choose the crackers in package A.

### Package A

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 4 crackers (22 g) pour 4 craquelins (22 g)	
<b>Calories 110</b>	% Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*
<b>Fat / Lipides 5 g</b>	7 %
Saturated / saturés 0.5 g	2 %
+ Trans / trans 0 g	
<b>Carbohydrates / Glucides 15 g</b>	
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 1 g	1 %
<b>Protein / Protéines 2 g</b>	
<b>Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg</b>	
<b>Sodium 100 mg</b>	4 %
Potassium 30 mg	1 %
Calcium 0 mg	0 %
<b>Iron / Fer 0.5 mg</b>	3 %
*5% or less is <b>a little</b> , 15% or more is <b>a lot</b> *5% ou moins e'est <b>peu</b> , 15% ou plus c'est <b>beaucoup</b>	

### Package B

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 14 crackers (30 g) pour 14 craquelins (30 g)	
<b>Calories 130</b>	% Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*
<b>Fat / Lipides 4.5 g</b>	6 %
Saturated / saturés 0.4 g	2 %
+ Trans / trans 0 g	
<b>Carbohydrates / Glucides 20 g</b>	
Fibre / Fibres 3 g	11 %
Sugars / Sucres 0 g	0 %
<b>Protein / Protéines 3 g</b>	
<b>Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg</b>	
<b>Sodium 160 mg</b>	7 %
Potassium 125 mg	3 %
Calcium 20 mg	2 %
<b>Iron / Fer 1.5 mg</b>	8 %
*5% or less is <b>a little</b> , 15% or more is <b>a lot</b> *5% ou moins e'est <b>peu</b> , 15% ou plus c'est <b>beaucoup</b>	

## What if a food does not have a nutrition facts table?

Fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, or homemade foods usually do not have a nutrition facts label. **Do not eat foods in the avoid lists.** They have more than 2 grams of fibre or are difficult for your body to digest.

If a food does not have a nutrition facts table and is not on this list, you can look up its nutrition information using the Canadian Nutrient File available at [food-nutrition.canada.ca/cnf-fce](http://food-nutrition.canada.ca/cnf-fce)

<b>Grains</b> (per ½ cup / 125 ml)	
<b>Tips:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat white bread, noodles, and rice instead of whole grain or whole wheat foods.</li> <li>• Cook cereal, grains, noodles, and rice until soft all the way through.</li> <li>• Limit pasta or noodles to 1 cup (250 ml) per meal.</li> </ul>	
<b>Avoid</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bread, baked goods, or pasta made with or labelled:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% whole wheat, whole grain, multi-grain, added bran, wheat germ, cracked wheat</li> <li>• corn, cornmeal</li> <li>• dark rye</li> <li>• pumpernickel</li> <li>• spelt</li> <li>• lentils</li> <li>• nuts, seeds, dried fruit, or coconut</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cereal: bran cereal, granola, hot or cold cereals with nuts, seeds, dried fruit, or coconut or more than 2 g fibre</li> <li>• corn, cornmeal, polenta, popcorn</li> <li>• grains: barley, bulgur, buckwheat, farro, freekeh, millet, quinoa, spelt, teff, triticale, wheat kernels</li> <li>• rice: brown, wild</li> </ul>
<b>Choose</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bread, baked goods, or pasta made with or labelled: white, 60% whole wheat, light rye</li> <li>• cereal: oatmeal (limit to ½ cup cooked), hot or cold cereal with less than 2 g of fibre per serving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grains: amaranth, sorghum</li> <li>• noodles: chow mein, egg, fresh, rice, soba, white, couscous</li> <li>• rice: all varieties of white, red</li> </ul>

## Vegetables

(per ½ cup / 125 ml vegetables or 1 cup /250 ml of leafy greens)

### Tips:

- Limit vegetables to two ½ cup (125 ml) servings per day.
- Take off skins, seeds, woody stems, or stringy parts of vegetables to lower fibre.
- Eat canned or well-cooked vegetables if raw vegetables cause you discomfort.

### Avoid

- artichokes
- asparagus
- bitter melon
- bell peppers
- bok choy, gai lan (Chinese broccoli)
- Brussels sprouts
- burdock
- cabbage: Napa, green, purple, sauerkraut
- celery
- chicory
- collard green
- corn
- fennel
- jicama
- kohlrabi
- lotus root
- mushrooms: all varieties
- okra
- parsnip
- peas: green, snap, snow
- shoots: bamboo, pea
- sprouts: alfalfa, bean, mung bean
- taro root and leaves
- tomatillo
- tough greens, like kale, Swiss chard, radicchio, Belgian endive
- vines leaves
- water chestnut
- wax gourd
- yam, yuca root, cassava

### Choose

- beans: green, yellow, string (well-cooked)
- beet
- broccoli, cauliflower (well cooked)
- carrots
- celeriac
- chayote (skin removed)
- cucumber (skin and seeds removed)
- eggplant (skin and seeds removed)
- green onion
- Jerusalem artichoke
- leek
- onion, shallot (cooked)
- plantain
- potato, sweet potato, yam (skin removed)
- pumpkin
- radish
- rutabaga (skin removed)
- summer squash, zucchini (skins and seeds removed)
- tender greens with stems removed, like arugula, baby spinach, chrysanthemum leaves, escarole, frisée, jute leaves, iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, watercress
- tomato: fresh, paste, sauce (skins and seeds removed)
- turnip
- winter squash, like butternut, acorn

**Fruit**  
(per ½ cup / 125 ml)

**Tips:**

- Limit fruit to two ½ cup (125 ml) servings per day.
- Take off skins, seeds, and membranes (outer part around each piece of citrus fruit, like orange or grapefruit) to lower fibre.
- Eat canned or well-cooked fruits if raw fruits cause you discomfort.

**Avoid**

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|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ackee</li> <li>• Asian pear</li> <li>• avocado</li> <li>• berries: blackberry, blueberry, elderberry, gooseberry, loganberry, mulberry, raspberry, strawberry</li> <li>• breadfruit</li> <li>• candied fruit or fruit peel</li> <li>• cherimoya</li> <li>• cherry: sweet, chokecherry, West Indian (acerola)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coconut</li> <li>• cranberry</li> <li>• currant</li> <li>• custard apple</li> <li>• dried fruit, like raisins, prunes, dates</li> <li>• durian</li> <li>• feijoa</li> <li>• fig</li> <li>• guava</li> <li>• juice with pulp</li> <li>• jujube (Chinese date)</li> <li>• kiwi</li> <li>• kumquat</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• longan, lychee, rambutan</li> <li>• mango, mangosteen</li> <li>• passion fruit</li> <li>• persimmon</li> <li>• pineapple</li> <li>• pomegranate</li> <li>• prune, prune juice</li> <li>• rhubarb</li> <li>• sapodilla</li> <li>• sapote</li> <li>• soursop</li> <li>• tamarind flesh</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

**Choose**

**(remove skins, seeds, and membranes before eating)**

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|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apple (skin removed)</li> <li>• apricot</li> <li>• canistel</li> <li>• citrus fruits with membrane removed: clementine, grapefruit, orange, pomelo, tangerine</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• canned fruit</li> <li>• fruit sauce</li> <li>• jackfruit</li> <li>• loquat</li> <li>• melon: all varieties</li> <li>• nectarine</li> <li>• papaya</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peach</li> <li>• all varieties of pear with skin removed (avoid Asian pear)</li> <li>• plum</li> <li>• quince (well-cooked)</li> <li>• ripe banana</li> <li>• seedless grapes</li> </ul> |
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<b>Protein</b>	
<b>Tips:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat stewed, braised, or ground meat and poultry.</li> <li>• Avoid meat and poultry that is tough, dry, over-cooked, with gristle, skin, or casing.</li> </ul>	
<b>Avoid</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dried meat, poultry, or fish, like beef jerky</li> <li>• fish with skin or bones</li> <li>• whole, cooked or canned legumes (beans, dried peas, lentils)</li> <li>• meats with casings, like sausage, hot dogs, salami</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dairy products with fruit seeds or skins, nuts, seeds or granola, like blueberry yogurt or cheese with nuts</li> <li>• whole nuts and seeds</li> <li>• textured vegetable protein</li> <li>• raw clams and oysters</li> <li>• oat or coconut milk/water</li> </ul>
<b>Choose</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tender meat including beef, pork, veal, lamb, chicken, turkey</li> <li>• fish, shellfish that is tender and easy to chew, like shrimp, lobster, crab</li> <li>• eggs</li> <li>• milk, non-dairy alternative such as soy, pea, almond, rice, or hemp milk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cheese, yogurt, ice cream, pudding, custard, sherbet that are smooth</li> <li>• smooth nut butters (limit to 1 Tbsp/15 ml)</li> <li>• tofu</li> <li>• well-pureed, commercial hummus (limit to 2 Tbsp/30 ml)</li> </ul>

<b>Other foods to avoid</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• candies, chocolates, and sweets with dried fruit or nuts</li> <li>• chili sauce or oils with pieces of chili pepper skins or seeds</li> <li>• marmalades and jams with seeds or fruit skins</li> <li>• relish, pickles, olives, chutney</li> </ul>

## **Low-fibre meal ideas**

- congee with scallion and protein food like egg, tofu, shrimp, or ground pork
- aloo paratha made with white flour and peeled potatoes, yogurt
- Greek or Icelandic yogurt, ricotta, or cottage cheese, ½ cup of diced melon, Rice Chex® or other low-fibre cold cereal.
- steamed bun filled with meat, ½ cup of sautéed zucchini (skin and seeds removed)
- meat, paneer, or tofu tikka masala, white rice or naan
- chicken noodle soup with ½ cup diced carrots, onion, and green beans cooked until soft

## Helpful tips for following a low-fibre diet

- Chew food well. Eat slowly.
- Eat small meals or snacks every 2 to 3 hours, instead of three large meals.
- Drink 9 – 12 cups (2.2 – 3 L) of liquids every day, unless your health-care team tells you otherwise. Liquids help move food and stool through your digestive tract.
- Do not use high-fibre foods in soups, smoothies, or other recipes. Blending or pureeing food does not lower the amount of fibre in the food.
- Some people find that when they eat a lot of fatty foods or high-fat dairy foods it causes them discomfort. Eat these foods less often and in smaller amounts if they cause you discomfort.
- Keep a symptom journal that includes the food you ate, what time you ate it, and how you felt after. Look at the journal for patterns of eating. How did this way of eating make you feel?
- If you have a lot of discomfort, add one new food to your diet every couple days. This will make it easier to tell if a specific food causes you discomfort.
- Avoid foods that cause you discomfort, even if they are low in fibre.

### What if I have trouble having bowel movements (pooping)?

Eating a low-fibre diet makes your risk for constipation higher. Constipation means you have bowel movements (poo) less often than is normal for you. If you have constipation, your bowel movement may be small, hard, dry, or difficult to pass (get out). Pain medications can make constipation worse.

**Talk to your health-care team if you have not had a bowel movement for more than 3 days.**

To help prevent constipation you can:

- **Stay hydrated!** Drink 9 – 12 cups (2.2 – 3 L) of liquids every day, unless your health-care team tells you otherwise. Anything you drink in a day, like water, milk, tea, and soup, is a liquid.
- **Keep active!** Physical activity, like walking and stretching, may help your bowels move.
- **Take medications your health-care team recommends.** Many people need medications, like laxatives, to treat or prevent constipation.
  - **Do not take fibre supplements, like psyllium (Metamucil®) or inulin (Benefibre®) while following a low-fibre or full-liquid diet.**
  - Talk to your health-care team about which medications are safe and may work best for you.

## What if I feel like I am not getting enough nutrition?

**! Talk to your dietitian if you are eating less than usual or losing weight without trying. Your dietitian can recommend ways to eat more calories and protein.**

Choose liquids that have calories and protein, like cow, soy, or pea milk, milkshake, or soup made with protein foods. You can also try nutrition supplement drinks like Ensure® or Boost®.

The best way to get vitamins and minerals is to eat a variety of foods. If you cannot eat whole fruits and vegetables you can try to:

- **Juice fresh fruits and vegetables.** Remember to remove seeds, skins, and pulp before drinking if you are following a low-fibre or full-liquid diet.
- **Make a smoothie from low-fibre foods.** Only drink ½ cup of smoothie at a time. Blending can concentrate many serving of fruits and vegetables into a small amount of liquid.
- **Take a regular strength multiple vitamin-mineral supplement.**

## When can I start eating fibre again?

Some people may need to be on a low-fibre diet for a short time. Other people may always need to be on a low-fibre diet. Talk to your health care team about when it is right for you to start eating fibre.

When it is ok for you to start eating fibre:

- **Slowly start to eat high-fibre foods.** Add a ½ cup (125 ml) of a new high-fibre food each day. If you have a lot of bloating, gas, or loose stool, add fibre more slowly.
- **Keep a list of high-fibre foods that you feel comfortable with after you eat.** Certain foods may always cause you discomfort – it is ok to avoid these foods.
- **Stay hydrated!** Drink 9 – 12 cups (2.2 – 3 L) of liquids every day, unless your health-care team tells you otherwise. Anything you drink in a day, like water, milk, tea, and soup, is a liquid. Fibre needs water to work properly in your body.



Note: This is not a full list of brands or products. Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre’s Clinical Nutrition department does not recommend one brand over another.

If you have questions about this nutrition information, please contact your dietitian:

**Name:**

**Phone number:** 416-480-6100 extension:

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