

Reducing Fibre in Your Diet to Manage Diarrhea

This handout offers information on how to reduce the amount of fibre in your diet. You may need to reduce the amount of fibre in your diet for a short time to help reduce diarrhea, gas, or cramping (abdominal/belly pain).

What is dietary fibre?

Fibre is the part of plant foods (examples: fruits, vegetables, legumes, and grains) you are not able to digest. A low fibre diet reduces the amount of undigested food moving through your bowels so your body makes a smaller amount of stool (poo).

How to reduce diarrhea, gas or cramping:

- Eat small meals or snacks every 2 to 3 hours.
- Drink at least 6 to 8 cups (1 cup = 250 ml) of fluids each day.
- Fluids that contain sugar (natural or added) can make your diarrhea worse. Drink less of these fluids (examples: pop, juices, fruit punch, iced tea or lemonade). You can dilute with an equal amount of water to include them in your diet.
- Fluids with alcohol and caffeine can make your diarrhea worse. Drink less of these fluids (examples: coffee, cola, and energy drinks).
- Hot fluids can make your diarrhea worse. It may help to let them cool to room temperature before drinking.
- If you are drinking nutritional supplements (examples: Ensure® or Boost®), drink them in smaller amounts (example: ¼ to ½ cup (75 to 125 ml) throughout the day).
- Peeling skin and removing seeds from fruits and vegetables helps lower the fibre content. Cooking, chopping, or blending food does not change the fibre content.
- Use white flour for any baking you do at home.

These food choices can make your diarrhea worse:

- Fried, greasy foods (examples: bacon, sausage, hot dogs, cold cuts, potato chips, and take-out foods such as burgers/fries/onion rings/fried chicken).
- Spicy foods (examples: hot sauce, hot peppers, cayenne pepper, red chili flakes, and spicy curry).
- Sugar alcohols such as sorbitol, xylitol, or mannitol commonly found in sugar-free chocolate and candy, gum and mints can cause diarrhea if used in large quantities.

You lose sodium and potassium from your body when you have diarrhea. To help replace the sodium and potassium your body may have lost:

- Eat salted crackers, pretzels, or drink broth to replace sodium.
- Drink/eat high potassium fluids/foods such as vegetable juices, diluted orange juice, papaya or pomegranate juice, potatoes (without the skin), tomatoes, bananas, and honeydew melon.

- Drink rehydration solutions containing sodium, potassium and glucose (examples: Gastrolyte®, Hydralyte®, Pedialyte®). These solutions are expensive. Drinking diluted sports drinks (mix equal parts drink and water) such as Gatorade or Powerade. Regular strength G2 Gatorade is another option.
- You can make a homemade rehydration solution by mixing ½ teaspoon of salt and 6 teaspoons of sugar with 4 cups of tap water. You can add flavouring drops such as Mio® or Crystal Light®.

After your diarrhea stops

Add high fibre food choices back into your diet slowly and in small amounts. Add one new high fibre food at a time. Stop eating these foods if your diarrhea returns. You can try to add them again after your diarrhea stops.

How to use the Nutrition Facts Table

Look for the Nutrition Facts Table on prepared, canned, or packaged foods to see how much fibre is in each serving.

Serving size

Low fibre foods have 2 grams or less of fibre per serving.

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 2 slices (71 g) / pour 2 tranches (71 g)	
Amount Teneur	% Daily Value % valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories 170	
Fat / Lipides 1.5 g	2 %
Saturated / saturés 0.4 g + Trans / trans 0 g	2 %
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium / Sodium 370 mg	15 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 33 g	11 %
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 3 g	
Protein / Protéines 6 g	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	0 %
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	0 %
Calcium / Calcium	6 %
Iron / Fer	15 %

Low fibre food choices

The BRAT (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast) diet can help reduce your diarrhea. Eating only foods in the BRAT diet does not provide enough nutrition for your body. You need to eat other food choices. The chart below lists low fibre food choices to eat. It also lists high fibre food choices to avoid eating.

Grains

	Low fibre food choices	High fibre food choices
Cereals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cream of wheat• Cornflakes• Oatmeal, unsweetened• Cheerios®• Rice Krispies®• Special K®• Or any cereal with less than 2 grams of fibre per serving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bran cereals (examples: bran buds, bran flakes or bran flakes with raisins)• Oat bran• Shredded wheat• Cornmeal
Breads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• White bread products (examples: bagels, buns, biscuits, English muffins, waffles, pancakes, pita, naan, tortilla, and sour dough).• Light rye bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whole grain or whole wheat bread products• Pumpernickel bread• Any breads made with bran, nuts, seeds, or dried fruits
Pastas and Rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• White rice• Couscous• White pasta (e.g. macaroni, spaghetti)• Rice noodles• Egg noodles• Glass noodles• Chow mein	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brown rice• Whole wheat pasta• Catelli Smart pasta• Barley• Quinoa• Bulgur• Millet• Teff• Farro• Freekeh

Vegetables and fruit

Raw vegetables (example: a salad) may be harder for you to digest and may cause gas and bloating. Eat cooked or canned fruits and vegetables more often.

	Low fibre food choices	High fibre food choices
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zucchini • Bean sprouts • Bok choy (1 cup) • Peppers (½ cup or 1 small) • Potato (no skin) • Mushrooms (white/cremini) • Mushrooms (portabello) (½ cup) • Tomato (skinless and seedless); tomato paste, skinless and seedless tomato sauce • Celery • Onions (½ cup) • Asparagus (6 spears or less) • Yellow or green beans (½ cup) • 1 medium carrot • Beets (½ cup) • Broccoli (½ cup) • Cauliflower (½ cup) • Roasted red peppers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potato with skin • Brussel sprouts • Corn • Lettuce • Parsnip • Turnip • Squash (winter) • Peas • Spinach • Kale • Sweet potato • Edamame beans • Pumpkin • Cabbage
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applesauce (½ cup) • Small or medium apple, no skin (1) • Canned mandarins • Canned peaches, pears, pineapple, fruit cocktail (all ½ cup) • Fresh pineapple – (½ cup) • Banana • Cantaloupe • Honeydew melon • Grapes (1 cup) • Clementine/tangerine/mandarin (1) • Mango (½) • Plantain (½ cup) • Seedless watermelon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avocado • Pears • Oranges • Blackberries • Blueberries • Strawberries • Raspberries • Cherries • Cranberries • Kiwi fruit • Fresh peach, nectarine • Apricots • Dried fruits (examples apple, apricots, coconut, dates, figs, prunes, raisins)
Juice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit juice (recommend diluting) • Vegetable juices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prune juice

Meat and meat alternatives

Cook meats until tender. Vegetarian meat products (examples: veggie burgers, veggie dogs) can be high in fibre as they are often made from legumes. Read the Nutrition Facts table for these products.

	Low fibre food choices	High fibre food choices
Meat, fish, poultry, and meat alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meats (examples: beef, pork, chicken, lamb, turkey, fish, and shellfish)• Eggs• Tofu• Smooth nut spreads (examples: smooth peanut butter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nuts and seeds• Flax seed• Chia seeds• Hemp hearts• Dried/canned beans and lentils, chickpeas• Refried beans• Sausages and processed meats with casings or skins• Chunky nut spreads (example: chunky peanut butter)

Milk and milk alternatives

Do not eat low fat or fat free ice cream as added fibre may replace the fat.

	Low fibre food choices	High fibre food choices
Milk, cheese, and milk alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Milk• Buttermilk• Milk alternatives (examples: soy milk, almond milk, cashew milk, lactose free milk)• Yogurt• Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheese with seeds• Yogurt that contains granola or nuts

Other foods

	Low fibre food choices	High fibre food choices
Snacks and desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrowroot cookies• Chocolate (without nuts or fruits)• Custard• Ice cream• Sherbet• Frozen yogurt• Jell-O• Plain cakes or cookies• Pretzels• Pudding• Rice cakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Popcorn• Tortilla chips• Granola/protein bars (with more than 2 grams of fibre per serving)• Vegetable chips• Trail mix• Nuts/seeds• Dried fruit• Low-fat ice cream

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soda crackers 	
Condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ketchup • Mustard • Relish • Barbeque sauce • Vinegar • Gravy • Jams and preserves • Olives • Pickles 	

Ask to talk to a registered dietitian in the cancer centre if you have questions or concerns about any information in this handout.

This handout was created by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre/Lakeridge Health. It was last reviewed in April of 2025.