

High fibre diet for women

Fibre is an important part of a healthy diet. Adults who have a low fibre diet are at risk of poor bowel health or associated problems, such as constipation or haemorrhoids.

Adequate dietary fibre can reduce your risk of developing problems such as high cholesterol, heart disease, bowel cancers and diabetes.

Types of fibre

Soluble fibre

Soluble fibre such as pectins, gums or mucilage make your bowel contents thicker so food stays 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 and vegetables, oat bran, seed husks, flaxseed, psyllium, legumes, peas, soy milk and soy products.

Insoluble fibre

Insoluble fibre such as cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin works to increase stool bulk, helping to improve bowel function and increase the rate at which contents travel through the bowel. This can help to relieve constipation.

Good sources include skins of fruit and vegetables, nuts, seeds, wholegrain foods and bran.

Resistance starch

Resistant starch is found in plant foods and keeps the bowel healthy. Resistant starch encourages the growth of healthy bacteria in the bowel and is sometimes referred to as a prebiotic. Resistance starch may provide similar benefits to other types of fibre, such as helping to prevent constipation.

It is found in unprocessed cereals and grains, potatoes, firm bananas, boiled long grain rice, baked beans and lentils.

Fluid is important too

Dietary fibre absorbs water to help keep the stool soft and for this reason it is essential that you have enough fluid. Increasing your fibre without fluid may make abdominal discomfort or constipation worse.

It is important that you drink plenty of fluid (mainly water) throughout the day. The recommended intake is 2.1- 2.3 litres per day for women.

Good sources of fibre

Breads and cereals

- > Choose wholemeal, multigrain or wholegrain foods e.g. breads, oats, muesli and flake type cereal.
- > High fibre white breads have less fibre than wholemeal bread but are still a reasonable choice.
- > Add a spoonful of wheat bran, oat bran or a bran mix to breakfast cereal.
- > Add dried fruit to breakfast cereals.

Fruit and vegetables

- > Choose fresh fruit with the skin remaining, rather than canned fruit or fruit juices.
- > Add dried fruit to cakes and biscuits.
- > Where possible, leave the skin on potatoes, pumpkin, zucchini, carrots and other vegetables.
- > Include legumes into your diet e.g. kidney beans, lentils and chickpeas.

Bran

- > It may not be necessary to add bran to your diet as enough fibre can usually be obtained from wholegrain breads and cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables.
- > If required, wheat, oat and rice bran can be added to breakfast cereals, stewed fruit or yoghurt.
- > Psyllium husks are another source of fibre that can be added into foods.

Nuts and seeds

- > Nuts and seeds, including coconut, are high in fibre.
- > Whilst healthy, nuts and seeds are also high in fat and should only be eaten in small quantities to prevent excessive weight gain.

Always remember to drink plenty of water, particularly when increasing your fibre intake.

How much fibre do women need?

Women need 28-30g of fibre per day.

The following table shows the amount of fibre in common food choices:

FRUIT	Serve	Fibre (grams)
Pear	1 medium	5
Banana	1 medium	4
Apple with skin	1 medium	3.5
Orange	1 medium	3.5
Peach	1 medium	2.5
Grapes	1 cup	2
Plum	1 medium	2
Strawberries	½ punnet	2
Nectarine	1 medium	1.5
Apricot	1 medium	1
Sultanas	1 heaped Tbsp.	2.0
Prunes	6	4.7
Prune juice*	1 glass	0
Fruit juice	1 glass	0
VEGETABLES (cooked)		
Peas	½ cup	4.5
Spinach	½ cup	4.5
Potato with skin	1 medium	3
Potato no skin	1 medium	2
Broccoli	½ cup	3
Carrot/Sweetcorn	½ cup	2.5
Cauliflower/Pumpkin	½ cup	2
Zucchini	½ cup	1.5
Tomato (raw)	1 medium	1.5
BREADS AND CRACKERS		
White bread	1 slice	1
White "hi-fibre" bread	1 slice	1.5
Multigrain bread	1 slice	1.5
Wholemeal bread	1 slice	2
Jatz	5	0.5
Vita Wheat Crackers	4	3

*Prune juice does not contain any fibre but has a high sorbitol content (12.2g sorbitol in 200ml) which may help with constipation.

CEREALS	Serve	Fibre(grams)
Sultana Bran	1 cup	6.5
Muesli	½ cup	6
FibrePlus	1 cup	6
Just Right	1 cup	5
Weetbix	2 biscuits	3.5
Porridge	1 cup	3.5
Sustain	1 cup	3.5
Weeties	1 cup	4
Cornflakes Wholegrain	1 cup	3
Rice bran	1 Tablespoon	2.5
Oat bran	1 Tablespoon	2
Cornflakes	1 cup	1
Nutrigrain	1 cup	1
Rice Bubbles	1 cup	0
LEGUMES		
Baked beans	½ cup	6
Red kidney beans	½ cup	6.5
3 bean mix	½ cup	6.5

Food product information contained in this resource was up to date at the time of revision. If you are not sure about a food, check with the manufacturer.

For more information

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