

Eating for good bowel health

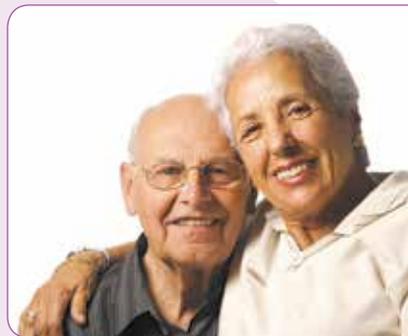
Information for you, your family, friends, & carers

Having a healthy bowel is important for our everyday comfort and long term health. However, we can experience bowel issues for a variety of reasons such as a stomach bug, or the use of certain medications. These problems are often temporary, but if you are experiencing more frequent or long term problems, changes to your diet may help.

What does it mean to have a healthy bowel?

Everyone's bowel habits are different; some people can go to the toilet a few times a day, whilst others go a few times a week. If you find you are going less often than usual, feel bloated, experience pain, or need to strain excessively when you go, you may be constipated. Hard, pellet-like stools (poo) are also a sign.

On the other hand, going to the toilet much more frequently than usual, having very loose or watery stools, or experiencing abdominal pain, may mean you have diarrhoea. **If diarrhoea is accompanied by a temperature, vomiting or pain, you should seek medical help as soon as possible as this may be a sign of a serious infection.**



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What is fibre?

Fibre is the part of food that cannot be digested and travels through our gut relatively unchanged. This means it can help our bowels work better by moving digested food through the body. Some fibre (like the type found in oats, pulses, fruit, and vegetables) can also help reduce cholesterol.



Fibre and Constipation

Having more fibre can help relieve constipation by softening and adding bulk to stools. If you experience constipation, try slowly increasing the fibre in your diet.

The following foods are great sources of fibre:

- Wholemeal bread and breakfast cereals
- Brown rice and pasta
- Oats
- Fruit and vegetables
- Beans and pulses
- Nuts and seeds

Top tips for increasing fibre

- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

All our main meals contain at least one portion of vegetables

- Choose wholegrain or granary options of bread and cereals. If you're not keen on the taste, try the 'half-and-half' variety of bread which tastes like white bread but has extra fibre. **In our tea menu, we offer sandwiches made with wholemeal bread**
- Try wholegrain breakfast cereals, muesli, or porridge with dried fruit. **You can choose a higher fibre cereal from our breakfast menu**
- Add beans and pulses in soups, stews and salads

Fibre and Diarrhoea

You should avoid high fibre foods if you are experiencing diarrhoea; limit wholegrain foods, nuts and seeds, and large amounts of fruit. However, small amounts of pulses and well-cooked vegetables can still be part of your diet.

Foods and drinks containing caffeine, artificial sweeteners, and high levels of fat can also make diarrhoea worse. Dry foods like toast (made with white bread) or crackers may help settle your stomach.

Does fibre affect my weight?

Fibre can help us feel fuller for longer, so if you are trying to watch your weight, fibre may help you control your portion sizes, and snack less often.

If you feel you are struggling to maintain your weight or you are losing weight, high fibre foods may make you feel too full.

Keeping hydrated

It's important to drink at least 6 – 8 cups of fluid every day. Drinking well can help reduce constipation, but it is also crucial to drink plenty if you have diarrhoea as you may become dehydrated. **We give all of our new clients a water jug that holds 1.5 litres; this is about the amount an average person needs to drink each day, and it's a perfect size for the fridge. If you would like further information, please ask for our poster with tips on how keep hydrated.**



Health Conditions

Diverticular disease

If you have diverticular disease, a diet high in fibre may help with your symptoms. The section opposite on constipation and fibre provides some ideas on how to increase the fibre in your diet. Some people may be advised to avoid nuts and seeds due to the possibility of blocking the diverticular openings. Please speak to your GP or dietitian if you are not sure whether you should be avoiding these foods.

Irritable Bowel Disease

If you have Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), we can provide useful information about the condition and your diet, so please get in touch.



And finally...

Some bowel issues may not be related to diet. If changes to your diet do not improve your symptoms, or if symptoms of diarrhoea persist for more than a week, contact your GP.

If you have any questions about any of the issues discussed in this resource or need any support with menu options, please contact our Nutrition & Wellbeing Team, who will be delighted to assist.



We also have a selection of additional booklets and leaflets for the following health conditions:

Diabetes, caring for someone with dementia, feeling forgetful, healthy heart, coeliac disease, kidney problems, chewing and eating difficulties, IBS, COPD, food labelling

This resource has been compiled using available current evidence and has been approved by a team of dietitians and nutritionists.

The information is for general use and should not replace individual tailored advice given by a healthcare professional.

For further information, please contact your local Support Team or visit our website on www.hertsindependentliving.org or contact us directly through nutrition@hertsindependentliving.org Alternatively, please call Hertfordshire Independent Living Service on **0330 2000 103** (all calls charged at local rate)

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