

# Family Friendly Fact Sheet

## Fibre



Foods that are rich in Fibre are the healthier choice as this nutrient has so many health benefits, so it is important to try and include as much fibre in your diet as possible. Fibre is a key nutrient for good health but most of us don't eat enough of it to achieve the associated health benefits.

**What is Fibre?** Fibre also known as Non Starch Polysaccharide (NSP) is an essential nutrient needed for healthy gut functioning. Fibre has two key functions in the body, to increase bulk within our gut and to aid transport of food through our gut.

**Where can it be found?** Sources of dietary fibre are usually divided according to whether they are water soluble or not. Both types of fibre are found in all plant foods, with varying degrees of each according to the plant's characteristics.

**Insoluble:** This is the fibre that the body can't digest, so it passes through the gut helping other food and waste products move along more easily. Examples of this type of fibre are Wholegrain breads, brown rice, wholegrain breakfast cereals and fruit and vegetables. Foods that are rich in this type of fibre are more bulky and so help make us feel fuller for longer, meaning we are less likely to over eat.

The functions of insoluble fibre are to keep the bowels healthy and stop constipation. This means that the body is less likely to get some common disorders of the gut

**Soluble:** This type of Fibre can be digested by the body and may help lower the amount of cholesterol in the blood. Good sources of this type of fibre are oats and pulses such as beans and lentils.

**Why is Fibre important?** A diet rich in fibre has many health benefits; it reduces the risk of a number of gut problems from constipation and piles to more serious problems such as cancer of the colon or large intestine.

In particular soluble fibre helps to stabilise blood sugar levels because it slows down the rate at which glucose is absorbed into the blood stream. It also helps to lower blood cholesterol levels, which is important for reducing the risk of heart disease.

Fibre also creates a feeling of fullness and can help weight loss as part of a weight loss diet.

**How much do we need?** In the UK most people are eating lower amounts of fibre than recommended, 12g per day or less. Ideally adults should aim for an intake of 18-24g daily. Example portion sizes are:

- 1 portion peas = 3.6g
- 1 carrot = 3.25g
- 2 slices whole meal bread = 4g,
- Bowl of bran-flakes = 5.5g.

**Sources** The following are some good sources of fibre for you to choose from...

- Breads: whole meal, granary, brown, seed, chapattis, pita bread, bagels, roti and tortillas.
- Potatoes, plantain and sweet potato,
- Whole grain cereals.
- Legumes (Beans, lentils and peas).
- Couscous and Bulgar wheat.
- Maize, cornmeal.
- Fruit and vegetables.
- Oats and barley.

It is important that we all try and eat a variety of starchy foods and choosing wholegrain, brown, or high fibre varieties where ever possible is recommended to ensure maximum fibre intake.

**Top Tips on how to increase you Fibre and Starchy foods!!**

- Bulk your meals out with pasta, rice, potatoes, vegetables and fruit
- Add beans and lentils to casseroles, curries and stews. This will decrease the amount of meat therefore decreasing cost and saturated fat content but increasing fibre – a win win situation!
- Replace white rice, pasta and bread with whole meal varieties.
- Experiment with different types of breads such as seeded and granary.
- Opt for whole meal cereals or add some to your favorite cereal
- Eat oats either as porridge or with yogurt and fruit to start your day the healthy way!