

Family Friendly Factsheet

Fibre



Fibre, or non-starch polysaccharides (NSP), is a very important part of our diet. Generally, people in the UK don't eat enough fibre, which can be found in foods such as wholegrain cereals, breads and types of pasta, fruits and vegetables.

Fibre is thought to have a number of beneficial effects on our health including increased protection against certain types of cancer, reduced risk of constipation and an increased feeling of fullness.

Fibre is only found in foods which come from plant sources such as cereals, fruits and vegetables. There are two types of fibre found in these foods; soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fibre is found in foods such as oats, beans and lentils and is thought to lower blood cholesterol levels. When digested, soluble fibre form a gum like substance, meaning that the body finds it more difficult to absorb sugars from these foods, so the absorption of sugars is slowed down allowing blood sugar levels to remain more constant. This may help to control cravings for sweet, sugary foods and has also been linked to diabetes prevention. Also, the gum like substance remains in the stomach for longer, helping to control our appetite.

Insoluble fibre is found in foods such as wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals, brown rice, fruits and vegetables. This type of fibre is not digested by the body, and helps food move through the digestive system quickly and easily, helping to keep bowels healthy and stop constipation. As insoluble fibre passes mostly undigested into the large intestine, bacteria present in the large intestine start to ferment the matter, increasing the amount of *Bifidobacteria*, which is a type of bacteria often used as a probiotic to aid digestion. Fermentation of fibre in the large intestine has also been linked to bowel

cancer prevention. Foods containing insoluble fibre also help to keep us feeling full for longer which means over eating is less likely. Although fibre intake in the UK is below the recommended amount, increasing fibre in your diet can be straight forward. Simply switching to wholemeal varieties will increase your daily intake of fibre, also, wholemeal bread, pasta and cereals tend to contain more vitamins and minerals as none of the grain is removed during production. Try porridge or muesli with fruit for breakfast and adding lentils or beans to stews and casseroles for an extra fibre boost.

Fibre is thought to reduce the absorption of certain minerals such as calcium and iron, however, as fibre rich foods are generally high in vitamins, increased fibre intake is not likely to result in a vitamin or mineral deficiency.

It is recommended that children under the age of five should not eat foods such as wholemeal bread and pasta or brown rice as their digestive system is still developing. Also, as a child under five has a relatively small appetite, the amount of vitamins and minerals provided from their diet is less than that of an older child so any risk of malabsorption should be reduced when possible.

From the age of five, more fibre rich foods such as wholemeal varieties of bread, cereal, pasta and brown rice can introduced given to children. At this age, the digestive system is developed enough and the diet varied enough, to cope with such foods.