

# Higher fibre diet

Reviewed by SickKids Hospital Staff

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Fibre is an important component of healthy eating. It helps with digestion and blood circulation. Find tips for how to increase your daily fibre consumption.

## Key points

- Fibre is not digested by the body, it goes through the digestive system and helps clean it out.
- There are two types of fibre: insoluble fibre is good for the digestive system and soluble fibre is good for the heart and blood circulation system.
- Canada's Food Guide recommends 3 to 6 servings of grain products per day for children and 6 to 7 servings of grain products per day for teenagers.
- Try to choose higher-fibre choices when eating grains products, vegetables, fruit and meat alternatives.

## What is fibre?

Fibre is a nutrient found in all plants. Unlike many other nutrients found in foods, fibre is not digested by the body. In a sense, fibre just goes through the digestive system. But this is why fibre is good for you. It helps clean out your digestive system.



There are two types of fibre: soluble and insoluble. All foods that have fibre have some of each type.

## Good reasons to follow a high-fibre diet

Insoluble fibre is good for the digestive system. It helps make your stool (poo) soft and bulky. This helps [prevent constipation](#). Insoluble fibre is found in whole wheat products, corn bran and flax seeds. It is also in some [vegetables and fruit](#).

Soluble fibre is good for the heart and blood circulation system. It may help lower blood cholesterol and help control blood sugar levels. Soluble fibre is found in fruits and vegetables. It is also in oat bran and oatmeal, barley, psyllium, and legumes.

Fibre can also help with weight control.

When adding fibre to your diet, increase the amount slowly. It takes a little time for your body to get used to the extra fibre.

Foods that have fibre are usually rich in other nutrients as well.

## Recommended daily fibre by age group

Age and sex	Daily amount of fibre
Girls and boys, 1 to 3 years:	19 grams (g)
Girls and boys, 4 to 8 years:	25 g
Girls, 9 to 13 years:	26 g
Boys, 9 to 13 years:	31 g
Girls, 14 to 18 years:	26 g
Boys, 14 to 18 years:	38 g

When choosing high-fibre foods, do not worry about the specific type of fibre. Many foods are high in both soluble and insoluble fibre. It is more important to eat high-fibre foods.

## What to look for on food labels

For fibre, food labels are marked like this:

- Source of Fibre: product with at least 2 g of fibre per serving.
- High Source of Fibre: product with at least 4 g of fibre per serving.

## Higher-fibre grain products

Canada's Food Guide recommends:

- 3 to 6 servings of [grain products](#) per day for children.
- 6 to 7 servings of grain products per day for teenagers.

Start your day with a higher-fibre breakfast cereal. Look for cereals with "bran" or "fibre" in the name.

- Add some fruits to your cereal, such as strawberries, raspberries or blueberries.
- You can add 1 to 2 tablespoons of unprocessed wheat bran to breakfast cereal.
- Add bran cereal or unprocessed wheat bran to muffin, pancake, and waffle mixes.
- Switch to whole grain flour. At first, switch half the flour from white to whole wheat. This will help you get used to the difference in taste and texture.
- Switch to whole grain breads and pastas.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
<b>Valeur nutritive</b>	
Per 125 mL (87 g) / par 125 mL (87 g)	
Amount Teneur	% Daily Value % valeur quotidienne
<b>Calories / Calories 80</b>	
<b>Fat / Lipides 0.5 g</b>	<b>1 %</b>
Saturated / satures 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g	<b>0 %</b>
<b>Cholesterol / Cholesterol 0 mg</b>	
<b>Sodium / Sodium 0 mg</b>	<b>0 %</b>
<b>Carbohydrate / Glucides 18 g</b>	<b>6 %</b>
<b>Fibre / Fibres 2 g</b>	<b>8 %</b>
Sugars / Sucres 2 g	
<b>Protein / Proteines 3 g</b>	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	2 %
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	10 %
Calcium / Calcium	0 %
Iron / Fer	2 %

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### Here is some advice to follow when choosing grain products

Lower-fibre choices	Higher-fibre choices
All white pasta; examples include macaroni, noodles, and spaghetti	Whole wheat pasta
Non-whole grain cereals; examples include Rice Krispies, Corn Flakes, Corn Pops, Froot Loops, and Special K	Whole grain cereals. Look for the words "bran," "whole," or "fibre" in the name of the cereal.
Non-whole grain cooked cereals; examples include Cream of Wheat	Whole grain cooked cereals; examples include oat bran, Red River, and oatmeal
All white breads. Examples include white bread, white or plain bagels, white bread sticks, dinner roll, Kaiser roll, English muffin, white hamburger or hot dog buns, white flour pita bread	Non-white breads. Examples include rye, whole wheat (look for the words "whole" or "stone ground"), multigrain, mixed grain, cracked wheat, whole wheat English muffins, hamburger and hot dog buns
Soda crackers	Rye crackers, graham crackers, Triscuits, whole wheat crackers
White rice	Brown rice, bulgur, barley, quinoa

### Higher-fibre vegetables and fruits

Canada's food guide recommends:

- 4 to 6 servings of fruits and vegetables per day for children
- 7 to 8 servings of fruits and vegetables per day for teenagers

### Here are some ideas on better fruit choices

Fruits and vegetables are very important in all healthy diets. There are no fruits and vegetables that should not be eaten, but high-fibre choices are better. Fruit and vegetable juices should be limited since they have very little fibre.

Low-fibre choices	Medium-fibre choices	Higher-fibre choices
Cherries	Oranges and tangerines	Pears with skin
Grapes	Peeled apples and pears	Apples with skin
Peaches	Pineapples	Mangoes
Melons, including honeydew melons, cantaloupe, and watermelon	Bananas	Blueberries
Fruit juices and peeled fruits		Raspberries
Fruit cocktails and sauces, such as apple sauce		Strawberries
		Dried fruits, including peaches, prunes, apricots, figs, raisins, and cranberries

### Raspberry-flax smoothie recipe

Fresh fruit smoothies are a great way to add more fibre in your diet. Adding flaxseed gives extra fibre. Try making this at home for breakfast. This recipe has 5 g of fibre per serving. Option: add other fruits, such as pear with the skin.

Mix in a blender and serve:

- 1/2 cup (125 ml) of milk
- 6 oz (175 g) plain vanilla yogurt
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) frozen raspberries
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) flaxseed

## Here are some ideas on better vegetable choices

Fruits and vegetables are very important in all healthy diets. There are no fruits and vegetables that should not be eaten, but high-fibre choices are better. Fruit and vegetable juices should be limited since they have very little fibre.

Low-fibre choices	Medium-fibre choices	Higher-fibre choices
Onions	Bean sprouts	Green peas: fresh, frozen or canned
Cucumbers	String beans	Snow peas
Mushrooms	Broccoli	Swiss chard
Tomatoes	Brussels sprouts	Legumes
Celery	Raw carrots	Popcorn (air-popped)
Cauliflower	Eggplant (aubergines)	
Cabbage	Parsnips	
Creamed corn	Turnip	
Potatoes without the skin, such as peeled and mashed	Corn on the cob	
Asparagus	Whole kernel corn	
Squash	Potato with skin	
Lettuce	Sweet potato with skin	
Spinach		

## Higher-fibre meat alternatives

Canada's Food Guide recommends:

- 1 to 2 servings of [meats and alternatives](#) per day for children.
- 2 to 3 servings of meats and alternatives per day for teenagers.

Although meat is not a high source of fibre, many meat alternatives are. Meals that combine meat with vegetables have more fibre than meat alone.

- Nuts and seeds should not be offered to children under 4 years of age.
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter has 2.7 grams of fibre. Spreading peanut butter thinly on a whole wheat cracker can help increase fibre.
- Add beans such as black beans, garbanzo beans, or kidney beans to meals.

Here is some advice to follow when choosing legumes, nuts, and seeds

Lower-fibre choices	Higher-fibre choices
Coconut	Lentils: fresh, canned, or dried Chickpeas Beans; examples include black beans, lima beans, baked beans, and kidney beans Nuts (for children over 4 years). Examples include almonds, pistachios, peanuts, and cashews Peanut butter (for children over 4 years)

## Milk and dairy products

Canada's Food Guide recommends:

- 2 servings of [milk and dairy products](#) per day for children under the age of 9 years.
- 3 to 4 servings per day for children 9 years and older and teenagers.

It is important to eat dairy foods, but they are not high in fibre.

## Higher-fibre snacks

Lower-fibre choices	Higher-fibre choices
Cupcakes	Bran or oat bran muffins
Cookies; examples include arrowroot, digestives, plain chocolate chip, Oreos, and shortbread	Oatmeal or oatmeal raisin cookies
Potato chips	Home-baked cookies with added wheat germ, wheat bran, nuts, or seeds
Ice cream	Popcorn (for children over 4 years)
Jell-O	Fruits and vegetables
Plain rice cakes	
Melba toast	

## General tips for getting more fibre and eating a healthy diet

- Use whole wheat flour with or instead of white flour. Add wheat bran to pancake, cookie, or muffin mixes.
- Use wheat germ, whole wheat bread crumbs, or ground nuts to coat chicken and fish.
- Add dried fruit to yogurt and hot and cold cereals.
- Although dairy products are not high in fibre, they are still an important source of nutrients. Continue to make these foods part of your child's diet.
- When having pasta sauce, add extra high-fibre vegetables. Use whole wheat pasta.
- Make vegetable and bean soups. Try adding bulgur or barley instead of pasta.
- Experiment with new higher-fibre foods; for example, chili, nachos with re-fried beans, and burritos.
- Snack on raw vegetables, fresh and dried fruits, or popcorn (for children over 4 years of age).
- Limit sugary, high-fat, and processed foods in your diet.

### When cooking

Add bran cereal, natural bran and chopped nuts to stews, casseroles, thick soups, and ground meat. When coating meat, use bran cereal and whole wheat bread crumbs.

### For dessert

Sprinkle bran cereal or low-fat granola (nut-free granola for children under four years of age) over pudding, ice cream, or cereal. Or add chunks of your favourite fresh fruit.

### **When snacking**

Try fresh fruit or raw vegetables such as carrots or broccoli. For children under four, cut fruit into small pieces and cook vegetables before serving.

### **Remember**

- Increase fibre content slowly to prevent bloating and gas.
- Offer plenty of fluids.
- As you increase fibre in your diet, you have to increase the amount of fluid you drink.
- Lack of exercise can lead to constipation. Make sure your child gets plenty of exercise.

## **Meal ideas**

### **Breakfast**

- Your child's favourite cereal sprinkled with natural bran or bran flakes
- Whole wheat toast with thinly spread peanut butter
- Fresh fruit
- Yogurt with fruit
- Smoothie with ground flaxseed
- Oatmeal

### **Lunch**

- Sandwiches using whole wheat bread or bun. For example, try turkey, lettuce and tomato, or peanut butter and jam on whole wheat bread.
- Chili, minestrone soup, or black bean soup. Puree the soup for children under four years old.
- Whole wheat pasta
- Raw vegetables and dip: for children four years of age and older.
- Plain popcorn: for children over four years of age.

### **Dinner**

- Chicken fingers or fish sticks coated in wheat germ, bran cereal or whole wheat bread crumbs
- Whole wheat pasta with tomato sauce
- Sweet potato with the skin



- Side serving of cooked vegetables
- Baked beans or chili made with beans. Puree this for children under four years of age.
- A whole wheat dinner roll can be served with the meal to boost fibre intake.

## Write down other ideas you have here:

Please visit [AboutKidsHealth.ca](http://AboutKidsHealth.ca) for more child health information.

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