

# Dietary advice for Bowel Obstructions

## Introduction

When you have a bowel obstruction, it means food is unable to pass through your intestines as it should. This can lead to you experiencing nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and can even cause you to feel constipated or for your stoma to stop working if you have one.

This leaflet is designed to give you dietary tips on how diet can help ease your symptoms and help prevent your bowels from becoming obstructed.

If you are in lots of pain and are feeling unwell, then please seek the advice of your GP or Consultant.

## What should I be doing?

When you are at risk of a bowel obstruction, it may help to reduce the amount of fibre in your diet. Fibre is the indigestible roughage found in fruits, cereals and vegetables. It normally helps to aid the movement of food and fluid through your digestive tract.

These foods can leave behind a 'residue' after digestion, therefore if you are at risk of a small bowel obstruction you may need to reduce your intake of high fibre foods (by following a low fibre diet) which may be poorly/partially digested, to prevent your bowels becoming blocked. The aim of reducing the fibre content is to reduce faecal bulk and/or reduce frequency of bowel motion.

The following are lists of foods to have and to avoid:

Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
<p><b>Breads and cereals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ White bread and white bread products: rolls, pita breads, wraps etc.</li> <li>✓ Low fibre breakfast cereals: Rice Krispies, Cornflakes and Special K.</li> <li>✓ White rice</li> <li>✓ White pasta</li> <li>✓ White flour</li> <li>✓ Corn flour, Semolina, Tapioca</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Wholemeal, granary, brown and high fibre white breads, wholemeal bread products (such as pita's and wraps etc.), fruit breads.</li> <li>✗ High fibre breakfast cereals: Weetabix, Shredded wheat, Bran flakes, Porridge Oats, muesli, Fruit and Fibre.</li> <li>✗ Brown rice</li> <li>✗ Whole-wheat pasta</li> <li>✗ Wholemeal and granary flour</li> <li>✗ Bran</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cakes and Biscuits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Plain cakes: Victoria Sponge(with seedless jam), Scones, meringues, iced buns</li> <li>✓ Plain biscuits: Rich tea, Morning Coffee, Malted Milk</li> <li>✓ White flour crisp breads and crackers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Cakes and biscuits containing wholegrain, nuts and fruit: Digestives and Hobnobs, fruit cake, carrot cake</li> </ul>

Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
<b>Fruit (2 portions/day allowed)</b> ✓ Fruit juice (not orange juice) ✓ Canned peaches and pears ✓ Melon ✓ Peeled and cored apples	✗ Fresh and dried fruit except those allowed.
<b>Vegetables</b> ✓ Potatoes (without skin) ✓ Well cooked vegetables: Carrots, squash, courgette, asparagus, beetroot and swede.	✗ Cold potatoes ✗ Vegetables except ones on allowed list (includes beans and pluses) ✗ All skins, pips, seeds and stalks.
<b>Meat</b> ✓ All meat allowed	
<b>Fish</b> ✓ All fish allowed	
<b>Dairy</b> ✓ Milk ✓ Yoghurts (no bits) ✓ Cheese ✓ Eggs	✗ Yoghurts with bits of fruit, nuts or muesli
<b>Desserts</b> ✓ Ice cream ✓ Milky puddings ✓ Jelly	✗ Any containing fruit or nuts
<b>Drinks</b> ✓ All drinks	✗ Fruit juice with bits
<b>Miscellaneous</b> ✓ Boiled sweets, fruit gums, mints ✓ Seedless jam, honey, sugar ✓ Tea, coffee, squash, fizzy drinks ✓ Salt, pepper, herbs and spices ✓ Clear soup ✓ Marmite ✓ Chocolate	✗ All nuts ✗ Jam/marmalade with bits ✗ Drinks with added fibre ✗ Soups with large chunks of vegetables ✗ Chocolate with fruit and nuts

## What should I do if I'm advised that I am obstructed?

When you are obstructed, it may help to go on a soft or liquid diet, to ensure your body still gets all the nutrients it needs. This can be achieved by liquidising the low fibre diet above or by having foods such as:

- Scrambled egg
- Mash potato made with cream and butter
- Fish (no bones) in a cheese sauce
- Soups with added cheese
- Inside of a jacket potato with either cheese or tuna mayo
- Shepherd's/cottage pie

- Well cooked pasta in a sauce
- Mashed carrots with butter
- Glasses of whole milk
- Milky puddings such as custard and rice puddings
- Ice cream
- Thick and creamy yoghurts
- Jelly
- Porridge

During this time, you may benefit from the use of nutritional supplements such as Complan or Meritene shakes and soups. Alternatively speak with your dietitian, doctor or specialist nurse.

## What shall I do if I have a poor appetite?

It is quite common for some people to find their appetite is poor and they don't feel like eating much. It is recommended you try the following:

- Try to eat small and frequent meals and snacks e.g. every two hours.
- Be positive about what you do eat – every extra mouthful helps.
- Try not to get out of the habit of eating. You actually need to eat to stimulate your appetite.
- Your appetite may come and go, so it is important to make the most of the times when you feel like eating.
- Don't worry if it isn't 'normal' foods at 'normal' times – if you fancy cereal at midnight, enjoy it.
- Try to relax and enjoy what you eat. Eat slowly and chew your food well, trying to rest before and afterwards.
- A short walk before a meal or some fresh air may help improve your appetite.

- Most of all indulge! Foods that are often seen as 'unhealthy' are high in energy and can be helpful when you are not up to eating much. Such foods are:

- Chocolate
- Crisps
- Cakes
- Ice cream
- Custard made with full fat milk and cream
- Glasses of full fat milk with added

skimmed milk powder

- Cream added to desserts
- Sugar added to drinks and cereal
- Jam, honey and syrup added to foods
- Butter added to allowed vegetables
- Butter, cream/mayonnaise added to mash

potato.

## Useful contacts

**Dietitian:**

Area J, Level 0  
Therapy Department  
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital Foundation  
Trust  
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Wonford  
EX2 5DW

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