

Fact sheet 14

If your bowel is blocked

We, Ovacome, are a support network for people affected by ovarian cancer in the UK. We provide information and support, raise awareness and put you in touch with others who are suffering from ovarian cancer.

A blocked bowel (also known as bowel obstruction) is a possible complication of ovarian cancer. This can happen for several reasons. The tumour can invade the bowel, causing a blockage. 'Sticky' tissue called adhesions can form after surgery and can stop food passing down the gut.

If you have experienced or are at risk of a blocked bowel, you may be advised to eat less fibre. This is known as a 'fibre-restricted diet'.

A low-fibre diet may not be suitable for you. If you are not sure whether this applies to you, please check with your doctor or surgeon.

Why should I eat less fibre?

Fibre (sometimes called roughage) is the part of food that you do not digest, which passes down into the lower part of the gut. Here, harmless bacteria ferment the fibre and produce gas (wind).

Eating less fibre will reduce the amount of waste you produce and, as a result, ease symptoms such as bloating and stomach pains. It may also reduce the risk of your bowel becoming blocked.

Will this type of diet work?

It is difficult to study the possible benefits of a fibre-restricted diet for a blocked bowel. Most of the evidence to suggest this type of diet is helpful comes from the experience of doctors, nurses and dietitians working with women with ovarian cancer.

What is a fibre-restricted diet?

This type of diet includes low-fibre foods and a reduced amount of fruit, vegetables and wholemeal products. Below are examples of foods you should avoid and foods which are allowed. This diet is also sometimes called a 'low-residue diet'.

What about constipation?

A fibre-restricted diet still contains some fibre. If you are worried about being constipated, talk to your doctor as you may need laxatives. For our bowels to work properly, it is important to have enough to drink. We normally need about eight to 10 cups of liquid each day.

What about vitamins and minerals?

When some foods are limited in your diet, it can be difficult to make sure you get the right amount of vitamins and minerals. It may be necessary to take a multivitamin and mineral supplement.

There are lots of supplements available in chemists, health food shops and supermarkets. A dietitian can give you advice about whether you need to take supplements, and they can also recommend which type to buy.

What if the diet is too difficult to follow?

As part of a healthy diet, we are all being encouraged to eat more fibre. Like many women who have been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, you may have been eating lots of fruit and vegetables, wholemeal bread and high-fibre breakfast cereals. So, a fibre-restricted diet can be completely different to your normal diet.

For this reason, this type of diet can be too difficult and stressful to follow. In this situation, a dietitian can give you advice on eating small amounts of high-fibre foods.

If your stomach is bloated and uncomfortable, it is often difficult to eat a normal-sized meal. This can eventually lead to you losing weight. It is usually better to have small meals and snacks during the day. If you have a poor appetite and you lose weight, try to eat foods high in fat and sugar. These types of foods will give you more energy. There are also nourishing drinks and supplements which your doctor can prescribe.

Is a fibre-restricted diet suitable for all women with ovarian cancer?

This type of diet is not suitable or necessary for all women with ovarian cancer. It is likely only to be a benefit if you have or are at risk of a blocked bowel.

If you would like more information or you would like to discuss anything to do with ovarian cancer, phone our support line on 0845 371 0554, Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm. Or, you can visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk.

Reviewed by Jane Power BSc RD,
Nutritional Support Dietitian, North Wales
NHS Trust, Wrexham.

July 2009

Low-residue diet provided by
Department of Nutrition and Dietetics
Poole Hospital NHS Trust.

ovacome
PO Box 6294, London W1A 7WJ
Phone: 0845 371 0554
Website: www.ovacome.org.uk
Email: ovacome@ovacome.org.uk



A low-residue diet

Foods you are allowed

Protein

Lean meat, chicken, fish, offal (liver, kidneys and so on), eggs and cheese.

Dairy

Cheese, milk, ice-cream, natural and fruit-flavoured yoghurts, custard, cream, butter and margarine.

Starchy food

White flour, bread or rolls.

White crackers, such as cream crackers and white biscuits such as Rich Tea.

'White ' pasta such as macaroni, spaghetti, white rice and pitta bread made with white flour.

Low-fibre breakfast cereal without fruit or nuts, such as Rice Krispies, Sugar Puffs, Coco Pops, Ricicles and Cornflakes.

Fruit

Tinned fruit including pears, apricots and peaches.

Ripe, peeled and cored apples, pears, peaches, apricots and melon.

Vegetables

Peeled and well-cooked potato, carrots, turnips, swede, marrow, beetroot, cauliflower florets and broccoli florets.

Sweets

Jam, marmalade without peel or pips, lemon curd and honey

Sweets, chocolate, cakes, biscuits without fruit or nuts and coconut.

Clear soups without vegetables.

Tea, coffee, malted drinks, hot chocolate, squash, Oxo, Bovril, salt and pepper.

Foods you should avoid

Protein

Tough stringy meat.

Dairy

Fruit yoghurt containing skins or pips.

Starchy food

Wholemeal flour, wholemeal brown bread, granary bread, soft-grain bread and rolls.

Wholemeal crackers, such as Ryvita and Crackerwheat, wholewheat biscuits, such as Digestives and Hob Nobs, wholewheat pasta and brown rice.

High-fibre breakfast cereals, such as Weetabix, Branflakes, Muesli, All bran, Shredded Wheat, porridge and Fruit and Fibre.

Fruit

All other tinned fruit.

Fruit with skins, pips or seeds, such as strawberries, citrus fruit, gooseberries, rhubarb and dried fruit.

Peas, pulses, celery, radishes, cucumber, spring onions, sweetcorn, cabbage, brussels sprouts, vegetable stalks, cauliflower and broccoli stalks, tomatoes and leeks

Rough-cut marmalade and jam with pips.

Sweets, chocolate, cakes, biscuits with dried fruit, nuts or coconut.

Soup containing vegetables.

Pickles and chutney and pure fruit juice with bits of fruit.