

Fact Sheet 14

If your bowel is blocked

Ovacome is a national advice and support organisation that works to connect patients, their family and friends; provide information on treatments, screening and research; raise awareness and support and give a voice to all those affected by 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 dieticians 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 dietician 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 dietician 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 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 if you would like to discuss anything about ovarian cancer, please phone our supportline on 0845 371 0554 Monday to Friday between 10.00 hrs and 17.00hrs.

Alternatively, please visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk

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

A low-residue diet

Foods you are allowed

Protein

Lean meat, chicken, fish, offal (liver, kidneys), 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, Ricles 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, whole wheat biscuits, such as Digestives and Hob Nobs, whole wheat pasta and brown rice.

High-fibre breakfast cereals, such as Weetabix, Bran flakes, 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.

Vegetables

Peas, pulses, celery, radishes, cucumber, spring onions, sweet corn, cabbage, brussel sprouts, vegetable stalks, cauliflower and broccoli stalks, tomatoes and leeks

Sweets

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.

Disclaimer:

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