

ovacome..
ovarian cancer

Diet for a blocked bowel



Ovacome is a national charity providing support and information to anyone affected by ovarian cancer. We give information about symptoms, diagnosis, treatments and research.

We run a telephone and email support line and works to raise awareness and give a voice to all those affected by ovarian cancer.

This booklet is part of a series giving clinical information about ovarian cancer. It is for those who want information on how to manage a blocked bowel.



Diet for a blocked bowel

A blocked bowel, also known as bowel obstruction, is a possible complication of ovarian cancer. This can happen for several reasons.

As the tumour grows it can press on the bowel, causing a blockage. Sticky tissue called adhesions can form after surgery and can stop food passing down the gut.

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

This sort of diet may not be suitable for you. If you are not sure whether this applies to you, please check with your doctor or specialist cancer dietitian.

Why should I eat less fibre?

Fibre, also called roughage, is the part of food that you do not digest. It passes down into the lower part of the gut where harmless bacteria ferment it and produce wind.

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

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white bowl of spaghetti. The spaghetti is twirled on a fork held by the person's right hand. The bowl is resting on a blue and white checkered tablecloth. The person is wearing a white t-shirt. The background is blurred.

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 diet is helpful comes from doctors, nurses and dietitians who work with people 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. The lists at the end of this booklet give examples of foods you should avoid and foods which are allowed.

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 fluid each day which is approximately two litres.

What about vitamins and minerals?

When some foods are limited in your diet, it can be difficult to make sure you get enough 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 advise if you need to take any supplements, and 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 people who are trying to eat healthily, 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.

If you are finding it difficult to follow a fibre-restricted diet, ask for a referral to a dietitian who can give you further advice on suitable food choices.

What if I'm losing weight?

If your stomach is bloated and uncomfortable, it is often difficult to eat a normal-sized meal. This can lead to you losing weight. It is usually better to have several small meals and snacks during the day.

If you have a poor appetite and you lose weight, try to eat foods high in energy such as those containing fat and sugar. While these foods are not generally recommended except as occasional treats, it is important to try and sustain your weight if your team has advised this. This means the usual recommendations do not apply to you at the moment.

Your doctor or dietitian may also recommend nourishing drinks and oral nutritional supplements to help stabilise your weight. These are likely to be available on prescription.

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

This type of diet is not suitable or necessary for all people with ovarian cancer. It may benefit you if you have, or are at risk of, a blocked bowel. Everyone is different and the guidance below is general. If you have questions or concerns about which foods to eat you should talk to your clinical team and/or specialist dietitian for individual expert advice.

If you have been diagnosed with a bowel obstruction, or are at risk of developing a bowel obstruction, or have a mass in your small or large intestine (bowel) and are at risk of a blockage, then your doctor or dietitian may suggest following the four-stage bowel obstruction diet. There are specific booklets produced by your NHS trust which you will be given if you require this diet.

NHS guidance states that this diet requires supervision from a registered dietitian or doctor, who will guide you as you move through the stages under their direction.

If you have been told you need to alter your diet to reduce the risk of a blocked bowel, you can follow the guidance below:

Foods you are allowed

Protein

- Lean meat, chicken, fish, offal (liver, kidneys), eggs, cheese, tofu, Quorn.

Pulses, nuts and seeds

- Smooth coconut milk, small portion smooth peanut butter, small portion hummus.

Dairy

- Cheese, milk (all types including dairy alternatives), ice-cream, natural and fruit-flavoured yoghurts, custard, cream, butter, margarine.

Starchy foods

- White flour, bread rolls, crumpets, scones, croissants, brioche, plain naan, chapatti, poppadums.
- White crackers (such as cream crackers), white biscuits (such as Rich Tea).
- White pasta (such as macaroni, spaghetti), white rice, pitta bread made with white flour, rice noodles.
- Low-fibre breakfast cereal without fruit or nuts (such as Rice Krispies, Sugar Puffs, Coco Pops, Ricicles, Cornflakes).

Fruit

- Ripe, peeled and cored apples, pears, peaches, apricots and melon.
- Fruit juice (no bits).
- Pureed, stewed, tinned or cooked fruit (without skins, pips or stones).
- Smooth fruit sauces and coulis with pips removed.



Vegetables

- Peeled and well-cooked potato, carrots, turnips, swede, marrow, beetroot, cauliflower florets, broccoli florets.
- Sieved tomato sauces or soup, including passata and tomato puree.
- Ripe avocado.
- Clear soups without vegetables.

Sweets

- Jam, marmalade without peel or pips, lemon curd and honey.
- Sweets, chocolate, cakes, and biscuits without fruit or nuts and coconut.
- Crisps, pretzels, cheese twists.

Other foods

- Condiments e.g. tomato ketchup, sweet chilli sauce, brown sauce, barbeque sauce, mayonnaise, smooth mustard.
- Tea, coffee, malted drinks, hot chocolate, squash, Oxo, Bovril, salt and pepper.



Foods you should avoid

Protein

- Tough stringy meat.

Pulses, nuts and seeds

- All varieties of pulses, nuts, seeds and beans.

Dairy

- Fruit yoghurt containing skins or pips.
- Ice cream containing fruit or nuts.

Starchy foods

- 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. Pearl barley, spelt, quinoa, bulgar wheat, gnocchi.
- High-fibre breakfast cereals, such as Weetabix, Bran flakes, muesli, All Bran, Shredded Wheat, porridge and Fruit and Fibre.

Fruit

- Fruit with skins, pips or seeds, such as strawberries, citrus fruit, gooseberries, rhubarb.
- Fruit juice with bits.
- Tomato and prune juice.
- All dried fruit.

Vegetables

- Peas, pulses, celery, radishes, cucumber, spring onions, sweet corn, cabbage, brussel sprouts, vegetable stalks, cauliflower and broccoli stalks, tomatoes, leeks.
- All vegetable skins, pips, seeds, stalks and peel.
- Soup containing vegetable chunks.

Sweets

- Rough-cut marmalade, jam with pips.
- Sweets, chocolate, cakes, and biscuits with dried fruit, nuts or coconut.

Other foods

- Pickles and chutney.
- Wholegrain mustard.
- Coleslaw.
- Popcorn.
- Tortilla crisps.



We welcome your feedback on this booklet. Please email ovacome@ovacome.org.uk or call 0800 008 7054. If you would like to discuss anything about ovarian cancer, please phone our support line on 0800 008 7054 Monday to Friday between 10am and 5pm. You can also visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk. This is one of a series of information booklets produced by Ovacome. You can see them here: ovacome.org.uk/information

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Disclaimer

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Version 2.7 | Date last updated Feb 2026 | Date for review Feb 2029



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