Article Series Nutrition

High-fiber food swaps for help managing constipation

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If you’re living with cancer, you may experience constipation: difficulty having a bowel movement or pain when having a bowel movement.

Constipation can be caused by several factors. It can be caused by the cancer itself, or as a side effect of cancer treatments like chemotherapy. Additionally, some medications and lifestyle changes, like less physical activity, may cause

constipation.

If you’re experiencing constipation, eating more high-fiber foods may offer relief, as incorporating more fiber-rich foods into your meals may help promote regularity and relieve discomfort.

There are two kinds of fiber: soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber dissolves in water and can support good gut bacteria, as well as lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels. It’s found in foods like apples, bananas, blueberries, citrus fruits, oats, lentils, peas and carrots.

Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water. It helps to add bulk and softness to the stool and helps promote regular bowel movements. It’s found in whole wheat foods, bran, quinoa, brown rice, legumes, leafy greens (such as kale), almonds, walnuts, seeds, fruits with edible skins (like pears and apples), and vegetables like turnip, peas, okra, and sweet potato.

Here are some food swaps that can help you add more fiber to your diet if you’re constipated. As always, consult with your care team for the guidance and recommendations that are best for you.

Swapping white flour for oat flour or whole-wheat flour in pancakes.

Whole grain flours contain more fiber than white flour because whole grain's outer layer, known as the bran, is still intact. This is where most of the fiber is found.

Adding flaxseeds or chia seeds to your next smoothie.

Chia or flaxseeds provide an extra fiber boost without dramatically changing the taste of your preferred smoothie recipe.

Making burgers or sandwiches with whole-grain buns or collard green wraps instead of regular buns.

Whole-grain buns have more fiber, and the collard green wrap is a low-carb, high-fiber alternative that provides a light, refreshing crunch.

Swapping a sweet breakfast cereal for oatmeal with your favorite toppings.

Oatmeal helps you start your day with more fiber, and you can customize toppings however you like them. If you prefer cold cereal, look for one with at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.

Cooking up mac and cheese with chickpea or lentil pasta instead of regular pasta.

This swap increases fiber and protein, adding more nutrients to a classic comfort food dish. You can try swapping these into other pasta dishes too.

Topping salads with roasted chickpeas instead of croutons.

Roasted chickpeas add crunch and fiber. Croutons, while crunchy, are often made with lower-fiber white flour.

Adding oatmeal or ground flaxseed to meatloaf instead of breadcrumbs.

These alternatives not only increase fiber but also help bind the meatloaf. Try using quick oats or blending rolled oats for a similar consistency to breadcrumbs.

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