Article Series Nutrition

Low-fiber food swaps for help managing diarrhea

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Cancer may cause a variety of changes to your digestive system. One common complaint is diarrhea: bowel movements that are watery, loose, and sometimes painful.

Diarrhea can be a symptom of cancer itself or a side effect of treatment. Cancer treatments like chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and radiation may lead to digestive issues, including stomach discomfort and diarrhea.

Whatever the cause, diarrhea can mean that your body isn’t absorbing the water and nutrients it needs. And beyond discomfort, it may also lead to more serious health problems, like dehydration.

A low-fiber diet is often recommended to manage diarrhea. Adopting a diet low in fiber may decrease the amount of bowel movements and ease the digestive process.

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, 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. Removing thick skins from produce like cucumbers and eggplant can help lower their fiber content.

Reducing your intake of insoluble fiber can help you manage diarrhea.

Here are some **Microsteps** to help you swap out your high-fiber foods for lower-fiber options. As always, consult with your care team for the guidance and recommendations that are best for you.

Swapping high-fiber fruits like apples and berries for low-fiber options like watermelon, bananas, or peeled peaches.

Fruit contains a lot of vitamins and minerals, but many fruits are high in fiber, which may lead to discomfort. Instead of reaching for an apple or a handful of berries, consider eating a ripe banana or a peach without the peel.

Replacing your morning oatmeal with scrambled eggs.

Whole grain oats are high in fiber, which may irritate your stomach. For breakfast, try eggs, which are high in protein but low in fiber.

Trying steamed or cooked vegetables instead of big leafy salads.

A big salad with kale or other lettuce varieties can be a big source of fiber, which may irritate your digestive tract. Instead, try cooking butternut squash or zucchini. Peeling and cooking vegetables can make them easier to digest. Enjoy these foods in small quantities alongside other, non-fibrous foods like broth, tofu or chicken.

Using Greek yogurt as a dip instead of guacamole or hummus.

If you’re looking for a creamy and delicious dip, consider using Greek yogurt as the base, and you can mix in a dash of lemon juice, dill, or a pinch of garlic powder for flavor. Avoid dips like guacamole or hummus, as avocados and chickpeas are packed with fiber.

Swapping beans in soups or stews with tofu, flaky white fish, or shredded chicken.

Beans are a source of protein, which is an important nutrient, but they're also high in fiber. Choosing tofu, fish, or chicken provides protein without the digestive strain, making meals gentler on the stomach while still nutritious.

Opting for white rice instead of quinoa or brown rice.

If you’re looking to keep fiber intake low, consider opting for white rice instead of brown rice or quinoa. Whole grains, while nutritious, are also packed with fiber, which may upset your stomach.

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