

If you would like further dietary advice, please ask a member of ward staff to refer you to the dietitians.

### **How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?**

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the main entrance of the hospital and at the entrance to every clinical area before coming in to and after leaving the clinical area or hospital. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

[www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk](http://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk)

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## **Healthy Bowels following Spinal Cord Injury**

### **Patient information leaflet**

If you require a translation or an alternative format of this leaflet please call the Nutrition and Dietetic Dept. on 01296 315775

**Safe & compassionate care,**

**every time**

# The Digestive System

The digestive system breaks down the food that you eat into nutrients that fuel your body. Food moves through the intestine, nutrients are absorbed and water is removed. The left over waste collects in the rectum as stool. A bowel movement is normally initiated when enough stool collects. The urge to empty your bowel intensifies as the rectum fills with stool. When you go to the toilet, your brain then signals the release of the anal sphincter muscle to remove the stool through the anus.

## Following Spinal Cord Injury

After spinal cord injury, messages from your body are not able to reach your brain in the same way as before your injury. This usually means you lose the sensation that your bowel is full, you do not feel the "urge" to empty your bowel and you experience loss of sphincter muscle control. This is commonly known as a **neurogenic bowel**, which can be experienced as 2 types:

- A **reflex bowel** is common with injuries above T12 (Upper Motor Neuron injuries). With a reflex bowel, the anal sphincter remains closed. However, a bowel movement can still occur at any time and without warning when the stool fills the rectum.
- A **flaccid bowel** is often experienced with injuries below T12 (Lower Motor Neuron injuries). The bowel does not usually empty itself, however, a loose sphincter muscle means mucus and fluid can seep around the stool and leak out of the anus.

### Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

**Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee 6-8 a day**  
**Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.**

**Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar**  
 Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

**Choose lower sugar products**  
 Dairy products

**Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts**  
 Oil & spreads

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 Oil & spreads

**Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins**  
 Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

**Fruit and vegetables**  
 Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

**Check the label on packaged foods**  
 Each serving (150g) contains

Energy	300kcal	13%	3.0g	6%	1.3g	26%	34g	68%	0.9g	15%
Fat	LOW	4%	LOW	7%	LOW	13%	LOW	58%	LOW	15%
Salt	LOW	7%	LOW	58%	LOW	13%	LOW	58%	LOW	15%

Typical values (as sold) per 100g/100kcal / 100kcal

**Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars**

**Online version can be found at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)**

## Diet and bowel function

### Loose stools:

- Reduce stimulant foods (foods that over stimulate bowel activity or draw excessive fluid into the colon):
  - Alcohol
  - Caffeine (tea, coffee, cola, chocolate)
  - Excessive dried fruit (e.g. Prunes, figs, apricots etc.)
  - Pure fruit juice
  - Sorbitol (synthetic sweetener)
- Initially reduce insoluble fibre
- Maintain soluble fibre (to ensure '5-a-day')
- Adequate fluid intake for hydration
- Then consider reducing soluble fibre, consider multivitamin.

### Hard stools:

- Increase fluid intake
- Encourage at least 5 portions fruit & vegetables per day
- Gradually increase insoluble fibre
- If intake of insoluble fibre is very high, try reducing the insoluble fibre gradually
- If changes to fibre content of diet makes no difference, return to normal balanced diet.
- Consider stool softener (laxative)

## Diet and bowel function

You may need to adjust your stool softness and diet. You should try to maintain a balanced diet (see Eatwell Guide on page 7) that is high in fibre. This will help maintain a formed stool consistency that allows for a successful bowel programme and prevent constipation.

### Increasing dietary fibre can:

- Encourage transit time
- Form bulkier stool

## There are two types of fibre:

**Insoluble fibre** – found in fruit skins, fibrous vegetables e.g. carrots, wholemeal/wholegrain flour, breads, bran and cereals. Insoluble fibre passes through the digestive system intact. It helps you to pass waste more easily by making the stools soft and bulky. This helps to prevent constipation.

**Soluble fibre** – found in oats, rye, beans, peas, lentils and other fruit and vegetable flesh

Soluble fibre forms a gel when mixed with liquid and increases the time taken for the stomach to empty. This means that glucose is released and absorbed slowly, which helps to regulate blood glucose levels. Soluble fibre also binds to excess cholesterol in the digestive system and prevents it from being absorbed. This helps to lower total and LDL (bad) cholesterol in the blood.

## How much fibre?

It is recommended we eat **30g** of fibre per day.

### How?

It is important to **increase dietary fibre gradually**, try introducing 1-2 new high fibre foods each week. It is also very important to **drink plenty of fluid**, aim for 2-3 litres per day unless otherwise advised by your doctor. Increasing dietary fibre too quickly may cause side effects such as bloating and wind. Increasing dietary fibre without drinking enough fluid can result in hard stools.

Check food labels – a food is high in fibre if it contains more than 6g per 100g.

Time	Food	Quantity (g)	Fibre content (g)
Breakfast	Bran flakes	40	8
	1 banana, sliced	100	1.5
Snack	Apple	100	2.4
Lunch	Baked beans	150	6.8
	wholemeal toast (2 slices)	70	4.7
Dinner	Baked potato with skin, tuna mayonnaise	180	6.5
	Salad (lettuce, tomato and cucumber)	138	1.7
	Low fat yogurt	150	0
	with strawberries	100	1.5
	and chopped almonds	13	1.3
<b>Total fibre intake:</b>		<b>34.4g</b>	

## Top tips to increase fibre in your diet:

- Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily.
- Beans / peas / lentils can be added to stews, casseroles, soups, lasagne and minced meat dishes. They are a good source of protein and so you can use less meat when adding beans to a recipe.
- Slice a banana or apple over your cereal in the mornings.
- Use wholemeal flour for crumble on top of fruit.
- Dried fruit can be sprinkled over breakfast cereals or used in baking.
- Whole grain rice can be used in savoury dishes.
- Wholemeal pasta can be used in a lasagne, as macaroni cheese or in other pasta recipes.
- Scones, tea breads, cakes and pastry can all be made with wholemeal flour. If preferred a mixture of 50% wholemeal and 50% white flour could be used.

### Watching your weight?

Take care, whilst oats and other cereals are a good source of fibre, some cereal products such as flapjacks, oatcakes, biscuits and cereal bars can contain large amounts of saturated fat and sugar, making them a less healthy way of eating fibre. Check food labels to help you make healthy choices