

Practical Guide To DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Why use this guide?

This guide is suitable for healthcare professionals giving practical advice on managing digestive health

- More than one third of the population report experiencing digestive problems
- Poor digestive health impacts on general wellbeing and quality of life
- One in five adults suffer chronic constipation
- Small changes to fibre intake could help to alleviate the burden of constipation

Supported by



This resource has been developed in collaboration with the WGO, supported by Kellogg's.



'Normal' digestive health is difficult to define

People should feel comfortable, and be without symptoms of constipation.

Common symptoms of digestive discomfort include:

- Abdominal pain
- Infrequent bowel movement
- Bloating
- Feeling more stressed
- Lethargy
- Subdued wellbeing
- Low mood

Different patients have different perceptions of symptoms.

Some patients regard constipation as¹:

- **straining** (52%)
- **pellet-like stools** (44%)
- **inability to defecate when desired** (34%)
- **infrequent defecation** (33%).

Constipation may be caused by inadequate intakes of fibre and fluid in combination with low levels of activity. In some cases it may be a secondary consequence of underlying disease or medication.

Correcting digestive health

Dietary fibre intakes across Europe and the Middle East are low and this is a leading cause of digestive ill health. Eight out of ten adults fail to reach the European recommendation of at least 25g fibre/day², and would benefit from an increase in fibre of 10g per day. Children also fall short of requirements and there is certainly room for improvement.

- 80% of adults don't eat enough fibre
- >50% of the elderly require laxatives

5 SIMPLE STEPS to help maintain GOOD DIGESTIVE HEALTH

1. Eat a healthy diet

Eat foods rich in fibre

Adequate fibre in the diet encourages passage of material through the digestive system and provides bulk and the right consistency to stools for easy evacuation. Ideally, adults should consume at least 25g of fibre per day (for optimal health aim for 30-40g). A diet adequate in fibre may reduce the risk of developing diverticular disease, heart disease, and colorectal cancer.



Information on nutritional value should be checked on food labels; high fibre foods contain at least 6g fibre per 100g, and 3g fibre or more per 100g means that the food is a source of fibre.

2. Eat moderately, slowly and regularly

Portion Size

Eat moderate portions to avoid ingestion of excessive calories and stress on the digestive system.

Timing

The process of digestion starts in your mouth. Eat slowly, chewing each mouthful well.

3. Ensure adequate fluid intake

Fibre needs fluid to swell and provide bulk¹

Poor hydration will slow the digestive process and increase risk of constipation. Recommended fluid intakes are for 2 litres per day for women and 2.5 litres per day for men. Water is best but tea, coffee, milk, squashes and juice all count (not alcohol).

4. Keep active – regularly

Try to exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes each day

One in five people take little or no physical activity. Across Europe and the Middle East, two thirds of the adult population does not reach the recommended levels of activity needed for good health.



5. Reduce/manage stress levels

Stress affects the nerves of the digestive system and can upset the intricate balance of digestion

Stress can slow the process of digestion, causing bloating, pain and constipation.

Management Cascade:
Discomfort, bloating and constipation

IDENTIFY AND QUANTIFY SYMPTOMS

Examination and symptom history

Use Food and Bowel Habit Diary if helpful

ELIMINATE ORGANIC CAUSES

See WGO Global Guideline on Constipation

LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION

Increase fibre > 25g/day,
Adequate fluid ~2l/day

MEDICATE IF REQUIRED

For more details on diagnosis and management see **World Gastroenterology Organisation Constipation Global Guideline** at www.worldgastroenterology.org/guidelines/global-guidelines

FIBRE & DIGESTIVE HEALTH

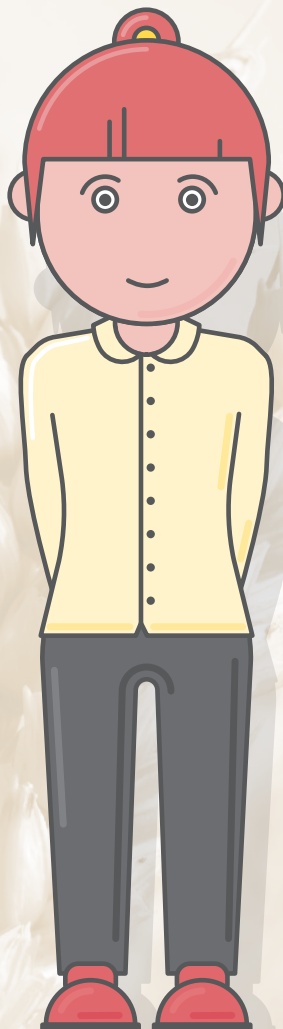
Fibre plays an important part in our digestive health.

SMALL INTESTINE

Because fibre is not absorbed in the small intestine, it can boost food volume, whilst adding less calories.

TOP TIP

Wheat bran fibre is the most effective for promoting good digestive health. Fibre from grains like wheat bran is more effective than fibres from other foods - it has the greatest effect on our stool bulking capacity.



MOUTH

From crunchy to chewy, fibre-rich foods offer satisfying tastes and textures.

STOMACH

Fibre contributes to feeling full, which can help limit overeating.

LARGE INTESTINE

- Fibre creates bulk to help push waste products out of the body.
- As fibre ferments during digestion, it releases fuel for the cells of the large intestine.

Did you know?

Schmier et al. (2015) showed that modest increases in daily fibre intake could result in substantial healthcare savings across Europe.

If 75% of adults increased their fibre intake by a small amount, European countries could save³



£127m



€121m



€8.7m

in healthcare costs associated with constipation.