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The Low Fiber Diet

Dietary fiber consists of all ingested plant foods that cannot be digested. It is not one chemical substance, but includes a variety of plant cell wall materials. Cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin are found mainly in vegetables and grains. Pectin, gum and mucilage are found in fruits, legumes, oats and barley. While all of these resist digestion by enzymes of the human intestine, some of these are partially fermented in the colon by bacteria, while the remainder are excreted unchanged in the stool.

Fiber absorbs water; increasing dietary fiber therefore pulls more water into the intestine and increases the water content of the stool. In this manner, a **high-fiber** diet increases stool bulk and stool weight, softens the stool consistency, and by stimulating intestinal motility, produces more frequent stools. A **low-fiber** diet contains a minimal amount of undigestible plant fibers, and therefore minimizes fecal residue, reduces stool bulk, slows intestinal transit, and tends to be constipating.

A **low-fiber diet** is indicated whenever decreased fecal bulk is desired. It is used, for example, in the treatment of any acute diarrhea or dysentery. It is also commonly recommended for relapses of inflammatory bowel disease, for example ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. It may be employed in partial intestinal obstruction, acute hemorrhoids, following intestinal or rectal surgery, or in individuals who have surgically shortened intestines.

Low-fiber diets are generally not recommended for long term dietary therapy. Dietary fiber is believed to be beneficial in the prevention of constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, diverticulosis, and possibly cancer of the colon.

GUIDELINES TO FOOD SELECTIONS

Low-Fiber Foods

Breads: white bread, white rolls, saltines, pizza, plain bagel, pancakes, plain pita

Cereals: cream of wheat, cream of rice, oatmeal (especially microwave oatmeal), corn grits, puffed rice, puffed oats, macaroni, cornflakes

Vegetables: cucumber, beets, mushrooms, summer squash, tomatoes without skins or seeds, potato without skin, lettuce

Fruit: cherries, pear without skin, applesauce, ripe banana, orange or grapefruit without membrane, peaches, strained fruit juices

Dairy and meats: essentially all

Foods to Avoid

Breads and cereals: whole grain, bran, seeds

Vegetables: all others not listed above

Fruit: berries, coconut, avocado, raw fruits, skins or seeds

Nuts: all

Meats: tough fibrous meats with gristle

Miscellaneous: pickles, olives, popcorn, wild rice, peanut butter, yogurt containing fruit