

Living better with inflammatory bowel disease

Following diagnosis, one of the main questions patients ask is what they should eat to help manage their inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Diet can affect the types and functions of the bacteria that live in your gut, as well as the protective lining of the gut. Choosing a healthy diet can help keep your gut healthy and prevent inflammation¹.

Nutrients and food sources to promote, as they have the potential to reduce inflammation in the gut

* Dietary fiber^{2 3 4}

- Soluble fiber: sweet potatoes, carrots, pears, apples, oranges, legumes, oats, barley, flax seeds, chia seeds.
- Insoluble fiber: wheat bran, dark green leafy vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, brown rice.

Fiber restriction is no longer recommended in IBD. A diet rich in a variety of fiber sources is important in maintaining a healthy gut.

* Resistant starch²

- Green banana, lentils, cooked and cooled legumes, plantains, cashews, barley, rye, cooked and cooled rice, potatoes or pasta.

Resistant starch may help reduce gut inflammation and help with symptoms in IBD.

* Some probiotic bacteria and fermented milks^{3 6}

- Fermented milks: yogurt, kefir, labneh, amasi, ayran.
- Supplements (capsules, powders).

Specific single- or multi-strain probiotic bacteria may be helpful in the management of ulcerative colitis. The available evidence is uncertain about the efficacy of probiotics for Crohn's disease.

* Omega-3 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFAs)^{9 10 11}

- Fatty fish: salmon, tuna, herring, sardines, trout.
- Seafood: oysters, mussels, shrimp.
- Flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, algae
- Omega-3 eggs.

Increasing the omega-3 PUFAs in the diet may help balance the immune system, reduce inflammation and improve the function of the gut lining.

* Vitamin D¹⁰

- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna mackerel), egg yolks, fortified dairy products, mushrooms.
- Sunlight exposure.

Vitamin D levels should be monitored in IBD, additional supplementation may be required to ensure adequacy.

* Some prebiotics^{2 3}

- Foods that contain prebiotics: onions, garlic, chicory root, artichokes and agave.
- Supplements: psyllium, inulin, fructooligosaccharides, xylooligosaccharides.

There is some evidence to suggest that prebiotics may have a beneficial effect in IBD. Some people may have difficulty tolerating certain types of prebiotic fiber, which depends on the bacteria present in their gut⁵.

* Polyphenols²

- Berries, green tea, whole grains (oats, barley and brown rice), nuts (almonds, walnuts and pecans), vegetables (dark green), fruits (apples, grapes, citrus fruit).

Polyphenols are a large group of compounds found in plant-based foods that can enhance the microbiome. They have been shown to promote the growth of beneficial bacteria and maintain the health of the gut lining in IBD.

* Lean protein sources⁷

- Fish, eggs, skinless chicken, turkey, legumes, tofu, soy-based products.

Lean protein sources are essential for growth and repair of body tissues, and they support muscle mass and immune function. Additionally, lean protein sources provide an important source of iron. People with IBD are at increased risk of low iron, so it is important to have your iron levels checked by your healthcare professional.

To enhance iron absorption, consume foods that are rich in vitamin C (citrus fruits, tomatoes, peppers) with foods that are high in iron⁸.

* Monounsaturated Fatty Acids^{9 10}

- Olive oil, avocados, nuts (almonds, cashews, pecans), pumpkin seeds, olives.

Monounsaturated fatty acids are a healthy fat and have been shown to have a positive effect on the microbiome.

Nutrients and food sources to limit in IBD, as they are associated with increased gut inflammation

* Omega-6 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFAs)^{9 10}

- Vegetable oils: corn, soybean, safflower, sunflower.
- Meat: meat from animals fed a corn-based diet.
- Processed foods: baked goods, snack foods, fried foods.

An excess intake of omega-6 PUFAs is associated with increased inflammation in IBD.

* Alcohol¹³

Any type of alcoholic beverage (beer, wine, spirits, cocktails).

Alcohol consumption is not recommended in IBD.

* Red meat

Beef, pork, lamb, veal.

A high intake of red meat has been associated with an increased risk of developing Crohn's disease and increased risk of relapse. Red meat intake should be limited to 4 ounces/week.

* Foods with food additives (excessive salt, emulsifiers and artificial sweeteners)¹²

• Limit intake of ultra-processed foods that contain emulsifiers (polysorbate 80, carboxymethylcellulose), refined carbohydrates, trans fatty acids, palm oil.

• Foods such as pastries, snack foods (chips, crisps), fast foods, processed meats, soda pop and sweetened beverages should be limited.

Increased ultra-processed food intake is associated with higher risk of CD. Choose whole, unprocessed foods such as whole grains, fruit, vegetables, lean protein and healthy fats instead.



There are different dietary options that can be used to help manage IBD. Before trying any of them, always seek the advice of a physician or another qualified healthcare provider who will recommend a tailored diet that fits your medical condition.

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