

High-Fibre Foods: Oats

A simple, affordable food that can contribute useful fibre while being adapted to different tastes, textures and routines.

Why fibre matters

Fibre is the part of plant foods that is not fully digested in the small intestine. Different types of fibre behave differently in the body, but together they can support bowel function, help feed the gut microbiome and contribute to cardiovascular and metabolic health. In the UK, adults are generally advised to work towards around 30 g of fibre a day, yet many people eat less than this.

Increasing fibre does not need to mean suddenly changing everything you eat. A familiar food such as oats can be one practical place to start. The exact fibre content varies by product and serving size, so package labels are the best source for the amount in the oats you actually use.

What makes oats useful?

Oats contain soluble fibre, including beta-glucan. Oat beta-glucan has been studied particularly in relation to blood cholesterol. Oats also provide carbohydrate, some protein, vitamins and minerals. They can be eaten hot or cold and adapted into porridge, overnight oats, baked dishes, smoothies or other familiar recipes.

The benefit is not that oats are a miracle food. They are simply one useful option within an overall pattern of adequate, varied nutrition. If oats are not safe, tolerated or enjoyable for you, there are many other sources of fibre.

Texture matters

For someone with sensory differences or ARFID, 'eat oats' may not be a simple instruction. Porridge can be thick, sticky, lumpy or unpredictable. The smell and temperature can also matter. It is reasonable to adapt the food to the person rather than expecting the person to tolerate a standard bowl of porridge.

You might prefer oats blended very smooth, made thinner, served cold, baked until firm, mixed into an accepted food, or avoided altogether in favour of another fibre source. A tiny change in preparation can completely change the sensory experience.

Increase fibre gradually

If your usual diet is low in fibre, a sudden large increase can cause wind, bloating or abdominal discomfort. Gradual increases are often easier to tolerate, and adequate fluid is important. People with certain gastrointestinal conditions may need individual advice about the type and amount of fibre that suits them.

Make oats work for your day

Convenience matters. Instant or quick oats can still contribute fibre. A prepared portion in the fridge can reduce morning decisions. If mornings are difficult, oats do not have to be breakfast; they can be eaten later in the day. If you need more energy or protein, suitable additions can make the meal more substantial, depending on your allergies, tolerances and preferences.

Possible additions include tolerated fruit, seeds, yoghurt or an alternative, milk or a fortified alternative, nut or seed butter where safe, or simply the flavouring that makes the food acceptable to you. Nutrition is more useful when the food is actually eaten.

Your fibre check-in

How much fibre do I currently eat? Am I trying to increase it too quickly? Do I drink enough alongside it? Which textures of oats, if any, are comfortable for me? Is there a different high-fibre food I would tolerate more easily? Could one small addition become part of an existing routine rather than another task to remember?

A message from me

High-fibre eating does not have to look like a perfect bowl covered in ingredients you would never choose. If plain oats are what you can manage, that counts. If you need them blended, cold, thin, baked or very predictable, that counts too. And if oats are not for you, we find another route. Supporting your body should include respecting the way you are able to eat.

Clinical note

This resource is general educational information. Fibre needs and tolerance differ. Persistent bowel symptoms, unexplained weight loss, blood in the stool, severe pain or significant changes in bowel habit should be medically assessed. If you have a restricted diet or gastrointestinal condition, a registered dietitian can help you increase fibre safely and appropriately.