

# Dietary tips for people living with ulcerative colitis



## How this booklet can help you

Ulcerative colitis (UC) is a lifelong condition that causes inflammation in the colon and rectum.

UC alternates between “**flares**” (which occurs when the disease is active) and “**remission**” (disease is inactive). Since there is no cure available for UC, the disease is managed through medication (even during periods of remission), or surgery.

This guide provides information about the role of diet in UC, dietary factors to consider when in remission and when flaring, and potential dietary modifications to help manage your symptoms while meeting your nutritional needs.

Keep in mind that there is not enough evidence to show that certain dietary modifications can be considered a treatment for UC. Please consult your registered dietitian or healthcare professional for further information.



**Did you know?** More than **70%** of people with UC report that inadequate nutrition increases the frequency and severity of symptoms

## SYMPTOMS ≠ INFLAMMATION

Symptoms and inflammation are not the same thing. There can be different causes for increased number of bowel movements without increasing inflammation. Other things like food intolerances, stress, and infection can also cause symptoms, which may be unrelated to your UC condition. Therefore, it is very important to undergo tests to determine if you have active inflammation **before** making major dietary changes. Remember, making healthy food choices is important to your well-being. Please speak to your healthcare professional to learn more.

## Getting started

The following are some general nutritional and lifestyle tips that can be used to help you manage your condition and lengthen the time between flares.

### Try to:



#### Eat small nutritional and balanced meals

- Eat five or six small balanced meals a day
- Take time to plan healthy, balanced meals. This will help with your caloric and nutritional needs. **In the next section (page 4), you will see what Canada’s Food Guide outlines as factors to consider when planning balanced meals**



#### Drink up

- Hydrate throughout the day by drinking plenty of water/fluids
- Avoid alcohol, carbonated or caffeinated beverages in excess as they can produce gas and/or stimulate your GI tract, causing diarrhea



#### Keep a food journal and eliminate trigger foods

- Keep note of what you eat each day to help you identify specific foods that may be triggering symptoms (such as bloating, diarrhea etc.)
- You can start by making note of everything you eat during a meal and then record any symptoms you may experience afterwards (such as bloating, diarrhea etc.)
- Once you have identified these triggers, you can work towards avoiding them
  - Just be sure you don’t eliminate entire food groups without speaking to your healthcare team as you may become nutrient-deficient



#### Manage stress

- Stress may make your symptoms worse and trigger flares
- Participate in activities you enjoy and exercise regularly, as this may help reduce tension and keep your bowels working properly
- Your healthcare team can help you come up with an exercise plan that’s right for you



#### Get adequate sleep

- Practicing good sleep hygiene is important to obtaining a good quality and quantity of sleep
  - Try to keep the room dim at night and avoid caffeine, working or watching television before bed



#### Take care of your mental health

- Anxiety and depression are common in ulcerative colitis
- Please reach out to your healthcare team for support

# The basics: Canada's Food Guide

Healthy eating means giving your body the nutrients it needs to function well. This is especially important for people with UC.

Canada's Food Guide outlines what to eat as well as appropriate portion sizes for each food group.

## A healthy, balanced diet is comprised of:

### Carbohydrates

The body's main source of energy

Sources include: Breads, cereals, oatmeal, rice, quinoa and pasta

### Fibre

Promotes healthy digestion

Sources include: Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, peanut butter and psyllium

### Proteins

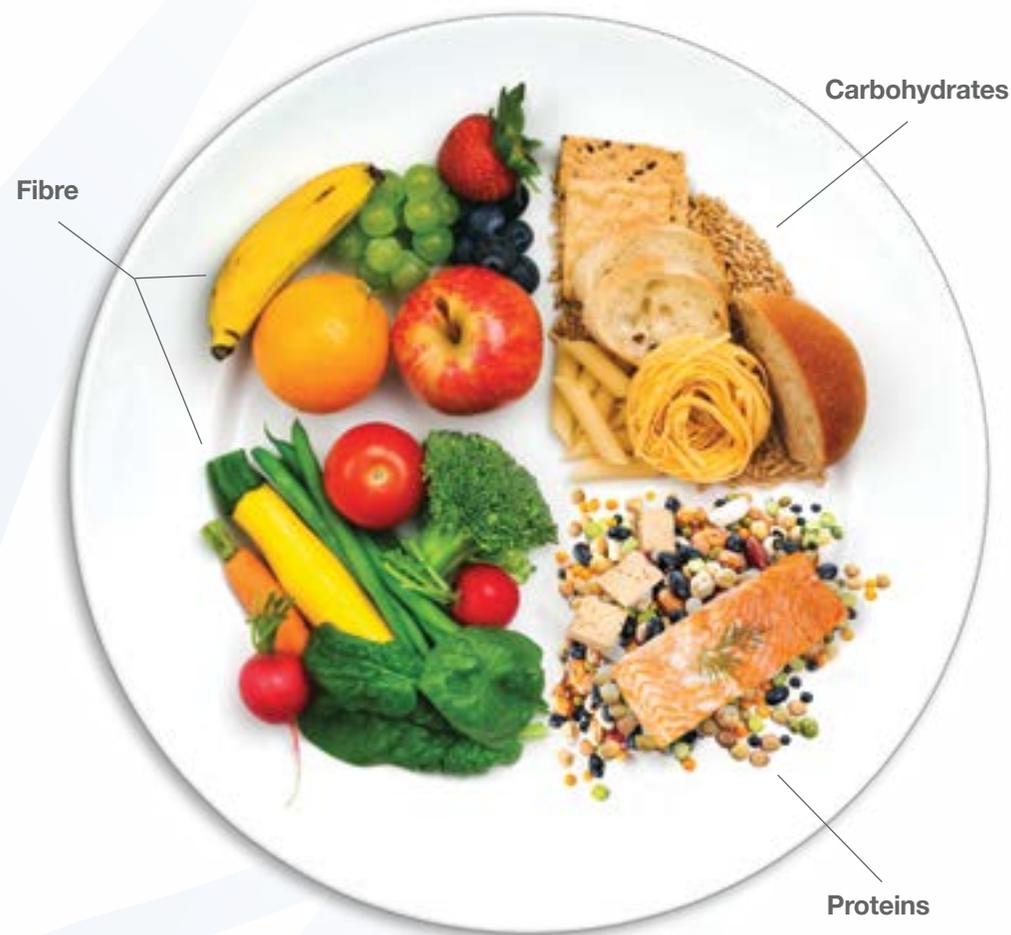
Important for growth and tissue repair

Sources include: Lentils, meat, fish, beans, tofu, eggs and peanut butter

### Fats

Helps absorb certain vitamins and provides essential fatty acids

Sources include: Oils (olive, safflower, avocado etc.), fish, butter, avocado, soybeans, nuts and seeds



For more information, visit [food-guide.canada.ca](http://food-guide.canada.ca) to access Canada's Food Guide

# The importance of dietary fibre

Fibre is the structural part of plants found in vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, seeds and legumes.

There are many health benefits associated with dietary fibre including:

- Restoring the balance between healthy and harmful bacteria in the colon
- Managing weight gain
- Controlling blood sugar in diabetes
- Reducing cholesterol
- Protecting against some types of cancer



Consult a registered dietitian or other healthcare professional about whether you have enough fibre in your diet and how you can gradually increase your intake if necessary (as adding too much too quickly can cause intestinal gas)

## Sources of fibre include:

Fruits, vegetables, oatmeal, wheat bran, barley, psyllium, nuts, chia seeds, legumes (such as chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils), brown or wild rice and whole grain breads



## How fibre affects the body

Some types of fibre, called soluble fibre, dissolve in water and slow the emptying of contents in the stomach through to the intestines. Soluble fibre forms a gel-like substance to help thicken loose bowel movements. Sources of soluble fibre include barley, legumes (chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils etc.), oatmeal, oat bran and chia seeds.

On the other hand, insoluble fibre does not dissolve in water and helps materials pass quickly through the intestine in order to relieve constipation.

If you have been told you have active inflammation, consuming more soluble fibre may help manage loose stools.



During a flare, good sources of soluble fibre include banana, apple sauce, starchy vegetables and whole wheat toast

# An overview of prebiotics and probiotics in UC

In ulcerative colitis the healthy balance of microorganisms living in the intestine is disrupted. However, there are ways that this balance may be restored through the use of both pre- and probiotics.

Prebiotics are found in foods that are metabolized by “good” bacteria in the intestine, creating short-chain fatty acids (a source of energy for the cells in the colon) and gases.

Probiotics are live, “good” (healthy) bacteria that are ingested and then grow (colonize) within the intestine, especially when taken on a regular basis.

There are multiple health benefits of prebiotics and probiotics such as maintaining the integrity of the gut lining, helping to form mucus, helping cells in the colon grow, helping to maintain a healthy balance of microorganisms in the gut and improving bowel habits.

Research on the use of pre- and probiotic supplements in UC is limited and supplements are currently not regulated in Canada. Therefore, it is important to speak with your healthcare provider before starting a supplement.



Talk to your healthcare team about whether or not you should take probiotics to help manage your condition

## Food sources of prebiotics



## Food sources of probiotics



### Not all sources of probiotics are created equally

For instance, when buying yogurt, look for packaging that says “contains active cultures” to ensure that you are getting as much live bacteria as possible

# Dietary modifications may help to manage UC

During times of flare or active disease, it may be helpful to make dietary modifications to help manage your symptoms. Benefits of dietary modifications may include:

- Decreasing the frequency of bowel movements
- Improving the consistency of bowel movements
- Reducing gas, bloating, cramping and pain
- Maintaining hydration and electrolyte balance
- Maintaining or improving nutritional status

Ultimately, dietary modifications can help you get back to social participation and enjoyment while maintaining a healthy relationship with food.

## Dietary modification strategies

There are several different ways to modify your diet. Here are some examples of strategies that may help reduce symptoms.

### To decrease the frequency and improve the consistency of bowel movements

If this is your goal, you may consider adding more fibre to your diet. Some ways of doing this include:

- Adding 1-2 tablespoons of psyllium or ground chia seeds into your smoothie
- Incorporating barley into soups
- Eating a bowl of oatmeal with sliced banana and nut butter
- Dipping crackers in hummus
- Limiting trigger foods such as alcohol, caffeine, fried/fatty foods, spicy food and raw vegetables if they bother you



Please speak with your healthcare professional and consider your food intolerances when choosing the appropriate strategy for you

### To reduce gas, bloating and pain

Consider:

- Eating smaller, more frequent meals to improve digestion
- Chewing your food well and eating slowly
- Soaking and cooking legumes over a longer period of time and discarding the liquid each time
- Choosing lactose-free products if you are intolerant to lactose

### To maintain hydration and electrolyte balance

Try to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of dehydration such as dry mouth, skin, dizziness, headache
- Ensure you stay hydrated by drinking 2.5 litres of fluid per day
  - Choose water, weak tea, diluted juice or broth
- Sip on an electrolyte beverage
  - Ask your registered dietitian for recipes

### To maintain or improve your nutritional status

Try to:

- Avoid skipping meals and snacks
- Choose caloric and nutrient-dense foods, e.g., nut butter, cheese, avocado, salmon, eggs, banana, kiwi, cooked vegetables, lentils, oatmeal, quinoa, chicken, pasta
- Drink a smoothie to boost caloric and protein intake
  - Access recipes that you may want to include as part of your meal planning by visiting <https://crohnsandcolitis.ca/Support-for-You/Crohn-s-and-Colitis-Canada-information-brochures/IBD-Kitchen>

## Dietary modification strategies

In addition to the strategies mentioned in the previous section, there are specific diets you can consider to help manage IBD, such as the Mediterranean diet, the elimination diet and the anti-inflammatory diet. Click the links below to learn more.

### The elimination diet

[health.clevelandclinic.org/elimination-diet](http://health.clevelandclinic.org/elimination-diet)

### The Mediterranean diet

[my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/16037-mediterranean-diet](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/16037-mediterranean-diet)

### The anti-inflammatory diet

[health.clevelandclinic.org/anti-inflammatory-diet](http://health.clevelandclinic.org/anti-inflammatory-diet)



Before trying any new diet, including eliminating specific foods, remember to talk to a registered dietitian or other healthcare professional to learn more about these diets. Please also keep in mind that no diet or modification strategy is a cure for UC.

### For more information about diet modifications, visit the following resources:

#### Crohn's and Colitis Canada: Diet and nutrition

[crohnsandcolitis.ca/About-Crohn-s-Colitis/IBD-Journey/Diet-and-Nutrition-in-IBD/Eating-and-Drinking-with-IBD](http://crohnsandcolitis.ca/About-Crohn-s-Colitis/IBD-Journey/Diet-and-Nutrition-in-IBD/Eating-and-Drinking-with-IBD)

#### Canadian Digestive Health Foundation: Diet and lifestyle changes

[cdhf.ca/en/diet-and-lifestyle-changes-for-inflammatory-bowel-disease/](http://cdhf.ca/en/diet-and-lifestyle-changes-for-inflammatory-bowel-disease/)

#### Mayo Clinic

[mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/lifestyle-and-diet-in-inflammatory-bowel-disease](http://mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/lifestyle-and-diet-in-inflammatory-bowel-disease)

## Prepare in advance

The following tips can help you meet your dietary goals when planning healthy meals:

- Create a meal plan containing nutritious meals and snacks
- Make a grocery list in advance so that you have the ingredients you need to make your meals
- Read food labels and compare products when shopping so that you can make choices that are best suited for you
- Transport, store and prepare your foods properly to avoid food-borne illnesses
- Keep your kitchen stocked so you have food handy
- Incorporate leftovers into new recipes
- Prepare large batches of meals and divide them into single-serving portions for future meals
  - This can help save you time cooking and makes mealtime easier for you when busy or experiencing low energy

### Foods to reduce

Healthy eating also means reducing certain foods that may not be as nutritious and are associated with inflammation.

The International Organization for the Study of Inflammatory Bowel Diseases recommends limiting the intake of:

- Ultra-processed foods (such as packaged snacks, processed meats, soft drinks and canned products)
- Artificial sweeteners
- Trans fats (sources include cookies, crackers, margarine, fried potatoes, potato chips and popcorn)



To learn more, visit:  
[badgut.org](http://badgut.org) • [Crohnsandcolitis.ca](http://Crohnsandcolitis.ca)



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