

Diet and Ulcerative Colitis

What is Ulcerative Colitis?

Ulcerative Colitis (UC) is a long-term (chronic) condition that causes inflammation and irritation of the large bowel (colon and rectum). UC usually begins in the rectum and lower colon, but it can affect the whole colon. If only the rectum is affected, this is called proctitis.

When your colon is inflamed, it is less able to absorb water. This can lead to severe diarrhoea. In some cases, ulcers (painful sores) may form on the lining of the colon. These ulcers can then bleed and produce mucus and pus.

What are the symptoms of Ulcerative Colitis?

Symptoms can vary from person to person and from mild to severe. You may have periods of feeling well (remission) or times when your symptoms are active (a flare up).

Symptoms of UC can include:

- Diarrhoea (including blood or mucus)
- Frequent need to open your bowels
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Anaemia

How can my diet affect Ulcerative Colitis?

There is a lot of research in to the causes of UC, including the role of diet. It is not yet clear whether diet may be a cause of UC; however your diet can play an important role in keeping you well during times of remission and may help to control your symptoms or maintain your weight during a flare up.

How can I adapt my diet during a flare up?

1. Increase foods high in protein

During a flare up you may have reduced absorption and increased losses of protein. Try to eat a protein rich food at every meal e.g. meat, fish, eggs, dairy food, Quorn™ or tofu.

2. Limit high fibre foods

This is also known as a low residue diet and may be helpful in controlling diarrhoea. High fibre foods include wholemeal bread or cereal, legumes, skins of fruits and vegetables.

3. Limit drinks high in caffeine

Drinks containing caffeine may worsen your symptoms. Try decaffeinated tea or coffee and herbal teas. Avoid soft drinks containing caffeine.

4. Reduce your fat

Fat may make your symptoms worse as it takes longer for the body to digest and can cause gas. Simple measures like cutting visible fat off meat, using low fat dairy products and using margarine instead of butter can help. However be aware that if you are losing weight it is not a good idea to cut down fat.

5. Limit gas producing starch (resistant starch)

Resistant starch is not completely digested by the body and so it can be fermented in the bowel and produce gas. By following a low residue diet you will already be reducing resistant starch. If gas continues to be a problem you may wish to try reducing some of the following foods:

- Pulses, whole grains, sweetcorn, green bananas and muesli that contains bran.
- Undercooked or reheated potato or maize/corn – instead eat them freshly cooked and still hot.
- Oven chips, crisps, potato waffles, fried rice.
- Part-baked and reheated breads, such as garlic bread, pizza bases.
- Processed food such as potato/pasta salad, manufactured biscuits and cakes.
- Ready meals containing pasta or potato.
- Dried pasta – use fresh pasta instead.

Following these principles, the following table may help to put all of these ideas into practice:

Food Group	Recommended	Avoid
Breads and cereals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• White bread, pasta potatoes and rice• Porridge, puffed rice, cornflakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wholemeal/ granary bread• Wholemeal biscuits e.g. digestives
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soft, canned or fresh fruit with pips and skin removed• Applesauce, bananas, peaches,• Fruit juices (no pulp)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lemon, oranges, grapefruit, rhubarb• Grapes, melon• Dried fruit
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soft, cooked vegetables with seeds and skin removed (such as turnips, squash, carrots, parsnips, courgette, potatoes)• Vegetables juices, tomato sauce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raw, tough, or stringy vegetables (such as asparagus, uncooked carrots, potato skins)• Peas, beans, lentils, sweetcorn, sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, onions, mushrooms, garlic

Meats, fish and alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any • Try to include oily fish e.g. trout, salmon, tuna, sardines once per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fat meats/fish e.g. those that have been fried or processed meats e.g. burgers/ hot dogs
Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fat dairy products (unless you are losing weight)
Miscellaneous		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coconut, nuts, seeds, spicy foods

What should I do if I'm losing weight?

When you have a flare-up it can be difficult to eat well. Symptoms such as pain and nausea may reduce your appetite. It is important to eat as well as possible to minimise weight loss.

- Start slowly and gradually eat more as you feel able.
- Eat in a relaxed environment. Sit at a table and take time with your meals.
- Eat slowly and chew food thoroughly.
- Eat small frequent meals, aiming for 6 small meals a day (start with ½ portions and build up)
- Avoid large quantities of fluid and drink only nutritious drinks e.g. milky drinks instead of tea and coffee.
- Consume fluids between meals rather than with them
- Increase foods high in sugar, fat and protein such as full cream milk, yoghurts and milky puddings. Try adding butter or cheese to soups or mashed potatoes. Snack on foods such as plain biscuits, toast or crumpets with plenty of butter or honey.

Do I need nutritional supplement drinks?

If you are not able to eat enough food during a flare up or have been losing weight, your dietitian may recommend that you include a nutritional supplement drink. These are available on prescription from your GP which your Dietitian will organise.

Do I need to follow a special diet when I am well?

There has been a lot of research in to diet and UC and so far there is no convincing evidence to suggest that you should follow a particular diet when you are feeling well and your symptoms are in remission.

It is not recommended that people with UC should follow a lactose free or a dairy diet. Research has not found this to be beneficial in the most people. Dairy foods are an important part of your diet and provide you with calcium. This is important to protect against osteoporosis, which is especially important if you are prescribed steroids.

If you think a particular food upsets you, leave it out for a few days, and then try it again. It may have been a coincidence. If you think you do have problems with lots of different foods, it may be worth starting a food and symptom diary and contacting your Dietitian. Cutting out lots of food can cause your diet to be unbalanced and lacking in vitamins and minerals.

For many patients with UC, we encourage you to return to eating your normal diet when your symptoms have settled. This should be based on a healthy, balanced diet which can include:

1. Eating starchy foods at each meal

These include bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes. If you have been following a low fibre diet, you should gradually increase your intake of fibre over a few weeks. Make sure that you drink plenty of fluids to prevent constipation.

2. Eating lots of fruit and vegetables

Try to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day when you are well. You can choose from fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced, but remember potatoes count as a starchy food, not as portions of fruit and vegetables.

3. Eating more fish

Fish is an excellent source of protein and contains many vitamins and minerals. Aim for at least two portions of fish a week, including a portion of oily fish.

4. Cutting down on saturated fat and sugar

Foods that are high saturated fat include meat pies, sausages, meat with visible white fat, hard cheese, butter and lard, pastry, cakes and biscuits and cream. Try replacing these with reduced fat versions and grilling or baking your food, rather than frying.

5. Trying to eat less salt - no more than 6g a day

Remember not to add salt at the table, taste your food first. Food labels that show a food has more than 1.5g salt per 100g are high in salt and should be limited.

6. Getting active and try to be a healthy weight

7. Drinking plenty of water

8. Eating regular meals

Can my diet help with tiredness and fatigue?

People with active UC can feel tired and lethargic. This may be due to your UC or due to poor absorption, poor diet or a lack of iron. If you have been told that your iron levels are low by the IBD team, eating the following foods may help:

- Red meat
- Dark green vegetables (ask your Dietitian if you are on a low residue diet)
- Eggs

If you feel extremely tired and unwell, you should speak to your doctor or IBD nurse for advice.

Ulcerative Colitis and Calcium

Making sure that you have enough calcium in your diet is especially important for people with UC. Your bones can sometimes be at risk of becoming weaker because of poor absorption of calcium, use of steroids and poor diet – especially if you are feeling unwell.

Your doctor or IBD nurse may have already arranged for you to use calcium supplements, but you can help to protect your bones further by making sure you eat enough calcium in your diet.

We recommend aiming to eat 5 or 6 portions of calcium containing food per day, which might include:

- A glass of milk or milk on cereal (fortified soya milk also contains calcium)
- A standard size pot of yoghurt (soya yoghurts also count)
- A matchbox size piece of hard cheese
- A small tin of bony fish e.g. tinned salmon or sardines
- 2 – 3 spoonfuls of green, leafy vegetables e.g. cabbage, broccoli
- 30g portion of fortified breakfast cereal
- Handful of dried fruit e.g. dried apricots or figs

If you feel that you would not be able to eat enough calcium in your diet, please talk to your doctor or IBD nurse.

Who can I contact for more support?

Aintree University Hospital Dietitians:

You can contact Aintree Dietitians Monday to Friday 8am – 4pm on via telephone 0151 529 3473

Crohns and Colitis UK

Telephone: 0845 130 2233

Email: <http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/>



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

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