

PREVENTING INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE

While its exact cause is unknown, most researchers believe that inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) involves a combination of a genetic susceptibility that “loads the gun” and a Western-style diet that “pulls the trigger.”

what is IBD?

IBD is a chronic inflammation of all or parts of the digestive tract. It primarily includes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. There is no cure. In the acute phase, loose and bloody stools, severe abdominal pain and weight loss are typical. Putting the disease into remission traditionally involves strong anti-inflammatory, immune-suppressing drugs and even bowel resection. And your diet may hold the key.

why does it occur?

Altered intestinal bacteria can cause IBD in genetically susceptible people. What you feed yourself determines the type and diversity of these bugs. A diet that's rich in animal protein and lacking in dietary fibre promotes an imbalance that results in inappropriate activation of your immune system and inflammation directly inside your intestines.

A high-fibre, plant-based diet can help to treat IBD and possibly even prevent it. A two-year study from Japan found advice to follow a semi-vegetarian

diet was highly effective in preventing relapses in people with Crohn's disease.

foods to eat

- ▶ Aim for 40–50 grams of fibre daily. This is easily achieved if your meals are based on unrefined plant foods such as legumes and wholegrains. Such foods also contain prebiotics, which are a food source for good bugs to grow on.
- ▶ Avoid animal-based foods, including meats (especially red meat) and dairy, which have been identified as strong risk factors for IBD.
- ▶ Probiotic supplements may be helpful, but there is no consensus yet on the best strains.
- ▶ Use only fats from whole plant foods such as nuts and cook with extra virgin olive oil. Avoid refined vegetable oils, margarine, fast foods and processed snack foods, as these usually hide pro-inflammatory fats.
- ▶ Avoid alcohol.

