

Low-residue diet

Definition

Residue includes any food, including fiber — the undigested part of plants — that remains in your intestinal tract, is not digested and contributes to stool. A low-residue diet limits these foods, reducing the size and number of your stools.

A low-residue diet is closely related to a low-fiber diet. In fact, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Technically, however, they're not the same thing, as a low-residue diet is more restrictive than is a low-fiber diet.

Purpose

Your doctor may prescribe a low-residue diet after you've had abdominal surgery or if you're experiencing a flare-up of a digestive problem, such as diverticulitis or inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Diet details

A low-residue diet limits the amount of fiber and other undigested material that passes through your large intestine. As a result, a low-residue diet reduces the size and number of your stools, helping to relieve abdominal pain, diarrhea or flare-ups of certain digestive problems, such as diverticulitis.

Because a low-residue diet can't provide all the nutrients you need to stay healthy, it should be used for only a short time, as determined by your doctor, before transitioning back to a low-fiber or regular diet.

The following foods can be eaten as part of a low-residue diet:

- Refined breads, cereals, crackers, chips and pasta with less than 1 gram of fiber per serving (Note: Ideally, look for products with zero grams of dietary fiber per serving.)
- White rice
- Vegetable juices without seeds or pulp
- Fruit juices with no pulp
- Milk, yogurt, pudding, ice cream, and cream-based soups and sauces (strained)
- Tender meat, poultry, fish and eggs
- Oil, margarine, butter and mayonnaise
- Smooth salad dressings
- Broth-based soups (strained)
- Jelly, honey and syrup

While consuming a low-residue diet, limit dairy products (such as milk, yogurt, pudding, ice cream, and cream-based soups and sauces) to no more than 2 cups a day.

You should avoid:

- Whole-grain breads, cereals and pasta
- Whole vegetables and vegetable sauces
- Whole fruits, including canned fruits
- Yogurt, pudding, ice cream or cream-based soups with nuts or pieces of fruits or vegetables
- Tough or coarse meats with gristle and luncheon meats or cheese with seeds

- Peanut butter
- Salad dressings with seeds or pieces of fruits or vegetables
- Seeds and nuts
- Coconut
- Marmalade

If you're eating a low-residue diet, a typical one-day menu might look like this.

Breakfast:

One-half cup cereal (with 1 gram or less of fiber per serving) with milk

Six to 8 ounces fruit juice without pulp

Snack:

Two slices low-fiber, refined white bread with seedless jelly or honey

Six to 8 ounces vegetable juice

Lunch:

Six to 8 ounces fruit juice without pulp, or water

Three ounces broiled fish

One-half cup white rice

Snack:

One cup yogurt

Six to 8 ounces fruit or vegetable juice

Dinner:

Six to 8 ounces fruit juice, vegetable juice or water

One cup broth-based soup (strained)

Three ounces broiled chicken

One-half to 1 cup low-fiber pasta with butter or flavored oil

Results

Eating a low-residue diet can help:

- Relieve symptoms — such as abdominal pain and diarrhea — that result from certain digestive problems, such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Ease your digestive system after surgery by reducing the number and size of your stools

Risks

A low-residue diet can't provide all the nutrients you need to remain healthy. Therefore, you should use a low-residue diet for only short periods, as directed by your doctor. If you must stay on this diet for a long time, consult a registered dietitian to make sure your nutritional needs are being met.