

Controlling your IBD

Diet and Nutrition - Dietary fat

Fat is essential in our diet. It is high in calories (useful if your appetite is limited), and helps us absorb essential vitamins A, D, E and K. In addition, fat in the diet can help 'carry' other useful food substances into our body, for example the anti-oxidant lycopene found in tomatoes. Fat forms an essential part of every cell membrane, and it is this role that influences inflammation and is of most interest to us.

All fats in our diet contain a combination of mono- and poly-unsaturated and saturated fat. The fat which is present in the greatest quantity defines how the fat is classified. For example, butter contains mono-unsaturated fats and poly-unsaturated fats, but as most of the fat is saturated fat, butter is classified as a saturated fat.

Mono-unsaturated fats

Mono-unsaturated fats lower cholesterol, but also help to bring inflammation under control, an important ability when you have active IBD. These are the best fats to include in the diet. Foods rich in mono-unsaturated fats include: olive oil, rapeseed oil, and foods containing these.

Polyunsaturated fats

Polyunsaturated fats tend to be liquid at room temperature. There are two main types, and although both lower blood cholesterol, they have opposite effects on inflammation.

Omega-3 polyunsaturates lessen inflammation, so are generally beneficial in the diet. Foods rich in omega-3 polyunsaturated fats include: oily fish, fish liver oils, fish oils, rapeseed oil, flaxseed (linseed) oil, evening primrose oil, starflower oil, seaweed, marine algae, walnuts, and green leafy vegetables.

Omega-6 polyunsaturates boost inflammation, so are not that useful a dietary choice if you have an inflammatory condition such as bowel disease or arthritis. Foods rich in omega-6 polyunsaturated fats include: corn oil, sunflower oil, soya oil, and margarines made from these.

Saturated fats

Saturated fats not only raise blood cholesterol levels but can worsen inflammation, so limit foods high in saturates to reduce these risks.

Foods rich in saturated fats: butter, lard, hard cheeses, hydrogenated vegetable fats, palm oil, pastries, biscuits.

Inflammation in IBD

As described above omega-3 polyunsaturated fats and mono-unsaturated fats have been shown to reduce background levels of inflammation. This is the reason that these fats are promoted for general good health as part of the Mediterranean diet.