

FIBER

Fiber is what gives strength and structure to plants. Dietary fiber is undigested plant residue that passes almost intact through the digestive system. Fiber is important to add bulk to bowel movements and keep food substances moving through the intestinal tract properly. Fiber holds water and softens the stool, making it easier to pass. Modifying your diet to increase your fiber intake has long-term health benefits. It reduces constipation, which may cause or aggravate hemorrhoids and diverticular disease. Fiber can also lessen diarrhea by absorbing excess water in the intestinal tract. Fiber helps to lower cholesterol and decreases your risk of developing colon cancer. Most grains, beans, and vegetables contain fiber.

There are two kinds of fiber: *Soluble* and *Insoluble*. **Soluble** fiber (oats, beans, strawberries, and peas) lower cholesterol (lowering your risk of heart disease) and help control blood sugar levels. **Insoluble** fiber (whole grains, cereals, apple skin, corn, and carrots) may prevent constipation and decrease the risk of developing certain types of cancer. Most fiber sources contain both kinds of fiber in varying amounts; both assist with digestion and are important for optimal bowel function and weight maintenance.

Foods that are high in fiber are excellent sources of complex carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals essential for a healthy body. Fruits and vegetables are not only naturally high in fiber, vitamin A and C, but are low in calories and contain no cholesterol. Some fruits and vegetables are good sources of other essential nutrients such as potassium, folic acid, and iron.

According to the National Cancer Institute and many nutrition experts, we should eat 20-35 grams of fiber daily. Most Americans average 10-15 grams of fiber. This means you may need to double or triple your fiber intake. Replace foods high in fat and calories with high-fiber foods such as fruits and vegetables. Replace whole grain breads, such as wheat, rye or pumpernickel, for white bread or rolls. Eat whole grain pasta, brown rice, and bran cereals. Beans and peas are especially high in fiber.

Increasing fiber in your diet can be an important step toward better health and a longer life. The list below gives you some specific suggestions:

Fruits: 2 servings daily ~ 6 grams of fiber (apples, oranges, strawberries or bananas)

Vegetables: 3 servings daily ~ 6 grams of fiber (asparagus, carrots, broccoli, and corn)

Legumes: 1 serving daily in place of meat ~ 4 grams of fiber (navy beans, lentils, chick peas)

Seeds: a small handful ~ 3 grams of fiber (sunflower seeds)

Whole grain breads and cereals: 6 servings daily ~ 12 grams fiber (wheat/oat bran cereals, whole grain pastas and crackers, wheat muffins/toast, corn tortillas)

Appearances can be deceiving. People believe that lettuce and celery have a high fiber content, when they are actually relatively low in fiber. Cherries and fruit juices are also low in fiber. Animal products, such as meat, cheese, milk, and eggs, have no fiber. Products made with processed grains (French or Italian bread, macaroni, biscuits, pancakes, cakes, and pie crust) are also low in fiber. When you shop, read the labels on prepared foods to determine whether whole grains are used. Foods rich in fiber are low in calories and fat, and fill you up more. High fiber foods are healthy for you and taste good. Be sure to eat a variety of them.

The best way to increase fiber in your diet is to eat high-fiber foods at each meal and for snacks. Cooking does not reduce the fiber content in most foods, however, the fiber content of fruits and vegetables is reduced when they are peeled. The following are recommendations for planning high-fiber meals:

Breakfast:

*Choose cereals high in fiber and low in fat and sugar

*Eat fruit or add fruit to your cereal (fresh and dried fruit, such as prunes)

*Mix fresh fruit or bran into low-fat yogurt

*Select whole grain breads

Lunch/Dinner:

*Add cut up vegetables to sandwiches, use whole grain bread

*Include beans in your green salad

- *Select bean or vegetable soups
- *Add bran cereal to ground meat
- *Eat a piece of fruit with lunch and dinner

Dessert/Snacks:

- *Blend shakes with fruit, skim milk, and bran
- *Whole grain crackers, low fat bran muffins or air-popped corn
- *Dried fruits
- *Fresh fruits or vegetables and dried fruits

Adding fiber to your diet can also be accomplished by taking a fiber supplement. Any fiber supplement is fine -- some of the more popular ones include Citrucel, Metamucil, Psyllium, Benefiber, and FiberCon. These work naturally with your body to help restore and maintain regular bowel function, unlike harsh chemical laxatives. Fiber supplements are available in sugar-free and sodium-free forms. They come in dissolvable powders, tablets, and wafers. Whichever form you choose, begin by taking one dose per day with an extra glass of water. You can gradually increase the number of doses per day over a 1-2 week period, allowing your body time to adjust, up to a maximum of three doses per day. For some individuals a rapid increase in fiber intake may result in gastrointestinal discomfort. If minor gas or bloating occurs, reduce the amount of fiber you take until your system adjusts or try another brand of fiber.

Rich Sources of Fiber (>= 4 grams per serving)

Apple or Pear with skin (medium)	4 grams
Artichoke	4 grams
Brussel Sprouts, Peas (1/2 cup)	4 grams
Spinach (1 cup)	4 grams
Baked potato w/skin (medium)	5 grams
Kidney,Lima,Pinto Beans (1/2 cup)	6 grams
Raspberries (1 cup)	6 grams
Wheat bran (3 tblsp)	6 grams
Blackberries, Boysenberries (1 cup)	7 grams
Navy Beans (1/2 cup)	7 grams
Lentils (1/2 cup)	8 grams
Bran cereal (1/3 cup)	10 grams

Moderate Sources of Fiber (1-3 grams per serving)

Banana, Peach, Nectarine (medium)	2 grams
Carrots (1/2 cup)	2 grams
Cherries (1 cup)	2 grams
Corn, Green beans (1/2 cup)	2 grams
Broccoli (1/2 cup)	3 grams
Prunes (5)	3 grams
Orange, Grapefruit (medium)	3 grams
Strawberries, Blueberries (1/2 cup)	3 grams
Oat Bran (3 tblsp)	3 grams
Wheat Cereal (1/3 cup)	3 grams