



Increasing Fiber in Your Diet

The Scoop on Fiber

Dietary fiber is the indigestible part of plant foods. It is found mainly in fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods & legumes, & passes relatively intact through your GI tract.

There are two types of fiber. Soluble fiber dissolves in water to form a gel-like substance. Think oatmeal. It can help lower blood cholesterol & glucose levels. Insoluble fiber doesn't dissolve in water, so its bulk promotes the movement of material through your GI tract. Think whole grain cereals. It can help with constipation or irregular stools.

At 15 grams of fiber a day, the average American doesn't get enough fiber in their diet. Healthy women up to age 50 need at least 25 grams of fiber a day. After 50 women should get around 21 grams of fiber. Healthy men up to age 50 need at least 38 grams of fiber a day, & after 50 should get around 30 grams.

Refined or processed foods like canned fruits & vegetables, pulp-free juices, white breads & pastas, & non-whole-grain cereals are lower in fiber. The grain-refining process removes the outer coat (bran) from the grain, which lowers its fiber content. Fresh whole unadulterated foods contain the most fiber.

Adding too much fiber too quickly can cause gas, bloating & stomach cramps, so increase fiber in your diet gradually over a few weeks to allow your digestive system time to adjust to the increase.

To receive the greatest health benefit, eat a wide variety of fiber-rich foods, which supplies nutrients that fiber supplements don't contain.

And drink plenty of water. Fiber works best when it absorbs water.

What Does a High-Fiber Diet Do?

Normalizes bowel movements. Dietary fiber increases the weight & size of your stool & softens it. A bulky stool is easier to pass, decreasing your chance of constipation. If you have loose, watery stools, fiber may help to solidify the stool because it absorbs water & adds bulk to the stool.

Helps maintain bowel health. A high-fiber diet encourages healthy gut microbes & may lower your risk of developing hemorrhoids & small pouches in your colon (diverticular disease). Studies have found that a high-fiber diet likely lowers the risk of colorectal cancer.

Lowers cholesterol levels. Soluble fiber found in foods such as beans, oats, flaxseed & oat bran may help lower total blood cholesterol levels by lowering LDL & total cholesterol levels. Studies have shown that high-fiber foods may have other heart-healthy benefits, such as reducing blood pressure & inflammation.

Helps control blood sugar levels. A healthy diet that includes insoluble fiber may reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. In people with diabetes, fiber — particularly soluble fiber — can slow the absorption of sugar & help improve blood sugar levels.

Aids in achieving healthy weight. High-fiber foods tend to take longer to eat & be more filling, so you're more likely to eat less & feel satisfied longer. High-fiber foods tend to have fewer calories than the same volume of low-fiber food.

Helps you live longer. Increasing your dietary fiber intake can improve your colon health & blood pressure, & reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease & a number of cancers.

How to Get More Fiber in Your Diet

- ◆ Choose a breakfast cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber per serving, with 'whole grain', 'bran' or 'fiber' in the name. Or gradually work up to a few tablespoons of unprocessed wheat bran added to your favorite cereal, yogurt or breakfast drink.
- ◆ Incorporate whole grains such as brown rice, wild rice & barley into your diet. Look for bread products that list a whole grain as the first ingredient & contain at least 2 grams of fiber per serving. Substitute whole-grain flour for half the white flour when baking, & add crushed bran cereal, unprocessed wheat bran or uncooked oatmeal to muffins, cookies & cakes.
- ◆ Include more peas, beans & legumes in your daily diet. Experiment with new recipes.
- ◆ Eat more unpeeled fruits & vegetables — 5 or more servings daily. You'll be getting vitamins & minerals, as well as more fiber. Example: an orange has more fiber & less calories than a glass of orange juice.
- ◆ For snacks, eat unpeeled fresh fruits & raw vegetables, low-fat popcorn & whole grain crackers. A handful of nuts or dried fruit can be a healthy snack, but watch your intake as both are high in calories.

Higher Fiber Foods List

Here are just some of the great high-fiber foods you can choose from. Most plants contain both soluble & insoluble fiber. For instance, the flesh of an apple contains soluble fiber while the peel contains insoluble fiber.

Soluble fiber foods are marked (S) & insoluble fiber foods are marked (I). One isn't better for you than the other. Since plants have varying levels of both types of fiber, it's important to eat a wide variety of fruits, vegetables & grains for optimal digestive & overall health.

- Bulgur/cracked wheat (I)
- Barley (S)
- Wheat bran (I)
- Quinoa (I)
- Oats/oatmeal/oat bran (S)
- Popcorn (I)
- Brown/wild rice (I)
- Wheat berries (I)
- Millet (I)
- Couscous (I)
- Whole grain cereals/flour (I)
- Whole grain pasta (S)
- Beans: pinto, black, lima, white, kidney, navy, soy (S)
- Peas: green, split green or yellow, sugar/snap (S)
- Legumes: lentils, garbanzo/chickpea, peanuts (mixed)
- Nuts: almonds, pecans, pistachios, hazelnuts, walnuts, macadamia, Brazil (mixed)
- Seeds: chia, flax, sesame, sunflower (mixed)
- Apples (S)
- Berries (S)
- Figs (S)
- Citrus fruits (S)
- Kiwis (S)
- Bananas (S)
- Avocados (I)
- Spinach (I)
- Broccoli (I)
- Brussels sprouts (S)
- Sweet/white potatoes (mixed)
- Cauliflower (I)
- Carrots (I)

