

FIBER

Nutrition Topics

University of New Hampshire

Fiber

FIBER has been recognized for its: Belly-filling quality, helping with weight loss, laxative effect , zero calorie content (the fiber part of foods), assistance in lowering blood cholesterol , help with regulating blood sugar levels, ability to increase the excretion of fat, therefore protecting against heart disease and possible role in the prevention of hemorrhoids, diverticulosis, constipation, and other intestinal problems like cancer of the colon. It is recommended to gradually increase fiber intake to 25-30 grams a day or up to 40 grams.

What exactly is fiber?

Fiber is an undigestible carbohydrate that gives structure to plants. Dietary fiber is defined as those components of food that cannot be broken down by enzymes in the human digestive tract, therefore providing no calories. Fiber is either insoluble or soluble.

Insoluble fiber

This fiber doesn't hold water. Insoluble fiber pushes things through the intestinal tract and aids in digestion. It can help to decrease constipation and reduce the risk of bowel diseases and cancer. Examples of insoluble fiber foods are wheat bran and whole grains.

Soluble fiber

This fiber absorbs water and forms a "gel" in the intestines. It increases satiety, helps stabilize blood sugar levels and can help decrease elevated blood cholesterol. Soluble fiber is in foods like oats, barley, legumes, fruits, pectin, vegetable gums and psyllium.

What NOT to do:

Don't go out and buy a jar of fiber pills or tablets. Fiber pills will not give you all the benefits that a variety of fibrous foods will provide. Don't buy boxes of bran and pectin to spruce up an otherwise unhealthy diet. A diet overburdened with fats and sweets is not going to become healthful by adding fiber. The right idea is to displace the fat in your diet with high fiber foods. Don't switch too fast. Your digestive system will be "screaming" at you if you suddenly toss out all of your refined carbohydrates and abruptly replace them with high fiber foods. A gradual switch will help you make and keep this long-lasting change in your daily eating plan. Don't focus on just one type of fiber. Whole grains may be the perfect cure for a slow digestive system and any type of fiber can assist in weight control, but pectins and gums can help your body handle fats, cholesterol and carbohydrates.

What to do:

Variety is the spice of life when talking about fiber. It is beneficial to consume a wide variety of fibrous foods, (fruits, vegetables, grains). Drink lots of liquids. Fiber can be constipating instead of stimulating if you are not well-hydrated. Look for "whole grain" or "whole wheat," for example, on the labels of bread and cereals. If "whole" is missing it means the dietary fiber and some vitamins & minerals have been removed. Keep foods fresh! Raw fruits and vegetables have more useful fiber than those that have been peeled, cooked, pureed or otherwise processed. Include fresh fruits and raw vegetables in your daily eating plan. Best advice: substitute complex carbohydrates (whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables) for some of the animal fats and processed sugars in your diet.

Where to get fiber

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (gm)
Breads		
Rye bread	1 slice	2
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	1.6
Cereals		
All-Bran	2/3 cup	17
Shredded Wheat	2 biscuits	4.4
Grape-Nuts	1/2 cup	3.6
Cheerios	1 1/4 cups	2
Fruits		
Grapefruit	1/2	2.6
Apple, with skin	1 medium	2.5
Banana	1 medium	2
Orange	1 small	1.8
Cantaloupe, cubes	3/4 cup	1.4
Vegetables		
White beans, boiled	1 cup	7.9
Chickpeas, boiled	1 cup	5.7
Corn, kernels	1/2 cup	4
Lentils, cooked	1/2 cup	4
Potatoes, cooked	1/2 cup	4
Peas, Green; boiled	1/2 cup	4
Celery, raw	2 1/2 stalks	3
Summer squash, raw	1 5-inch	3
Rice, brown, cooked	1/2 cup	2.5
Carrots, cooked	3/4 cup	2.1
Broccoli, cooked	3/4 cup	1.6
Cauliflower, cooked	1/2 cup	1.2
Carrot, raw	1 medium	1.1
Rice, white, cooked	1/2 cup	0.1
Lettuce	1 cup	trace

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