

Dietary Fiber

A Key Ingredient for Good Health



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Eat more fiber. You've heard it before and it seems simple enough to do; yet most Americans only consume roughly half of their recommended dietary fiber quota. If you're one of them, you're really missing out because a diet rich in fiber is a powerful tool for good health.

Dietary fiber – found in fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains – has long been recognized for its ability to prevent constipation. But a high-fiber diet has the potential to do much more: lower cholesterol, prevent heart disease, improve blood glucose, lower the risk of diverticular disease and aid weight loss.

How much dietary fiber do you need, and how can you start including more of it into your meals and snacks? Read on to find out.

Fiber 101

Although not considered a nutrient, dietary fiber plays an important role in keeping you healthy. Dietary fiber includes any parts of plant foods that your body cannot digest or absorb. There are two main types of dietary fiber, insoluble and soluble. Each plays a unique role in the body.

Insoluble fiber is generally referred to as “roughage.” Insoluble fiber promotes regularity and helps prevent constipation and diverticulosis by adding bulk and softness to stools and decreasing the time food spends in your intestines. Good sources of insoluble fiber include wheat bran, whole-wheat cereals, breads, pasta, rice and vegetables.

Soluble fiber is widely recognized for its ability to lower cholesterol and improve heart health. Here's how it happens: As soluble fiber passes through the intestines it forms a gel, binding with digestive enzymes (bile acids), and promoting their excretion as waste. Because the liver uses cholesterol to make bile acids, it must draw cholesterol from the blood in order to create more. The net result is a reduction in cholesterol absorption and a decrease in total and "bad" (LDL) cholesterol levels. In a similar manner, soluble fiber helps to control the speed at which sugar enters the bloodstream, having the potential to improve blood glucose.

Good sources of soluble fiber include oatmeal, oat bran, barley, brown rice, legumes (beans and peas), psyllium, ground flaxseed, and a variety of fruits and vegetables.

In addition to the health benefits already mentioned, a high-fiber diet can also aid in weight loss. Fiber-rich foods are generally low in calories and fat. They bulk up in your stomach to fill you up faster and help you feel satisfied following the meal. This means fewer cravings during the day. Fiber-rich foods also generally take longer to chew, slowing you down and reducing the chance you'll overeat.

How Much Fiber Do I Need?

The Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences, recommends the following amount of dietary fiber each day for good health:

- Ages 50 and older: Men, 30 grams; Women, 21 grams.
- Ages 18 to 50 years: Men, 38 grams; Women, 25 grams.
- Children under age 18: Age + 5 grams (Example: a 6-year-old should consume 6 + 5 grams, or a total of 11 grams daily)

The average American consumes 14 grams of fiber each day. If you aren't getting enough fiber in your diet, you're missing out on many potential health benefits — and great tastes and textures — that come with a high-fiber diet.

Good Sources of Fiber

To get started on adopting a diet rich in fiber, it helps to know which foods offer the greatest fiber bang for your buck. Use the table below to see how much fiber your favorite foods contain.

Food	Serving Size	Total Fiber (g)
100% Bran cereal	½ cup	12.6
All Bran cereal	½ cup	8.8
Kidney beans, cooked	½ cup	6.9
Shredded wheat and bran cereal	1 cup	6.3
Garbanzo beans, cooked	½ cup	6.2
Black beans, cooked	½ cup	6.1
Oat bran, cooked	1 cup	5.4
Lentils, cooked	½ cup	5.2
Baked potato with skin	1 medium	4.7
Flaxseed, ground	2 Tbsp	4.5
Oatmeal, cooked	1 cup	4.0
Brussel sprouts, cooked	½ cup	3.8
Split peas, cooked	½ cup	3.1
Orange	1 small	2.9
Apple with skin	1 small	2.8
Broccoli, cooked	½ cup	2.1
Onions, cooked	½ cup chopped	2.0
Peach	1 small	2.0
Baby carrots	10 medium	1.8
Banana	½ small	1.1
Seedless raisins	¼ cup	1.0

** Source: Fiber content from ESHA Nutrition Analysis Software food processor*

Fiber can also be found in supplements. Although these are good sources of fiber, whole foods are generally preferred because supplements lack the important vitamins, minerals and nutrients that can only be found in whole foods.

How Much Fiber am I Getting?

Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and beans are good sources of fiber, and you don't have to read a food label to make that determination. But for other foods, you can learn about their fiber total by reading their packaging. Here are some tips on determining how much fiber is in your food.

Just the Facts

The Nutrition Facts panel on food labels provides you with the amount of dietary fiber provided in a single serving of food. You can also look at the front of a food's package to see if it lists any of the following nutrient content claims:

- *High Fiber Food* – 5 grams or more of fiber per serving
- *Good Source of Fiber* – 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber per serving
- *More or Added Fiber* – at least 2.5 grams of fiber per serving

The Health Claim

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved two health claims that allow food companies to promote the heart disease-fighting benefits of whole grains on qualifying products. Choose foods boasting one of the following claims on the label:

- *“Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol and rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain some types of dietary fiber, particularly soluble fiber, may reduce the risk of heart disease.”*
- *“Soluble fiber from foods such as (name of food product) as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.”*

Double Check for Whole Grain

If you want to get a fiber boost, avoid products that list enriched or bleached flour as the main ingredient. Look for the word “whole,” as in whole wheat flour, listed as the first ingredient in a food to determine if it is truly a whole grain.

Fitting in Fiber

Here are some quick and easy ways to fit fiber into your diet each day:

- Start your day off with a high-fiber, whole grain breakfast. A warm bowl of oatmeal topped with fresh fruit and nuts is a great way to get a fiber jump-start.
- Sprinkle ground flaxseed or crushed bran cereal over oatmeal, in smoothies, or in your favorite muffin recipe.
- Enjoy a serving of fruit at every meal.
- Substitute fruit juice with whole, fresh fruit (keeping skin on when able).
- Munch on fresh vegetables dipped in a light dressing for a mid-day snack.
- At lunch and dinner, fill half your plate with raw, steamed, stir-fried or roasted vegetables.
- Choose brown rice over white and whole wheat pasta over enriched. Give other whole grains a try: whole wheat couscous, bulgur, wild rice, quinoa, spelt, or kasha.
- Enjoy more beans. Toss garbanzo, kidney or navy beans in salad; replace cooked beans or lentils for meat in your favorite recipe; or enjoy a hearty bean soup for lunch.
- Add roasted soybeans (soy “nuts”), walnuts or almonds to salad or stir-fry.
- Create a homemade trail mix of nuts, seeds, dried fruit and whole grain cereal.
- Dip your favorite veggies or baked chips in a pureed bean dish, like hummus or low-fat refried beans.
- Next time you bake, substitute whole grain flour for half of the white flour in a recipe.

Keep in mind that adding too much fiber too quickly can cause bloating, gas and constipation. So take your time, and remember to drink plenty of fluids. Your body will thank you for it.

Use Our Quick Fiber Guide

Not all foods listed as “whole grain” contain adequate fiber, so it is essential to become food label savvy. Follow this quick guide when purchasing breads and other grains:

Cereals – should contain at least 5 or more grams of fiber per serving.

Breads – should contain at least 3 or more grams of fiber per serving.

Crackers – should contain at least 2 or more grams of fiber per serving.

Rice and Pasta – should contain at least 2 or more grams of fiber per serving.



Here's to Your Good Health

You can enjoy tremendous health benefits when you make small but significant changes in the way you eat. A great first step is to take advantage of the Healthy Appetite program, designed by Cleveland Clinic and Heinen's. For nutrition tips and meal ideas, please visit www.heinens.com/healthyappetite. Here's to your good health!

Healthy Appetite

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the resources of
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