

FIBER-RICH FOODS TO FUEL YOUR HEART



Heart health is a topic I am frequently asked about, specifically, people want to know how to reduce blood pressure, raise protective HDL cholesterol, and lower LDL cholesterol.

While we're on the subject, let's dig into these and other heart health metrics before we talk about food choices that can help optimize these numbers.

Key Metrics to Assess Heart Health

When it comes to heart health, there are a few numbers you should know. These are pretty routine tests, so if you haven't seen your doctor in over a year, it would be wise to schedule an appointment sooner rather than later.

- **Blood pressure:** This is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. The goal is less than 120/80 mmHg.
- **Total cholesterol:** Shows how much cholesterol is circulating in your blood. The goal is less than 200 mg/dL.
- **High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL):** Known as your "good" cholesterol because it moves cholesterol from your arteries to your liver. The goal is 60 mg/dL or above.

- **Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL):** The "bad" cholesterol that, in excess, contributes to plaque buildup in your arteries. The goal is less than 100 mg/dL.
- **Triglycerides:** Triglycerides are a type of fat found in your blood, and high levels may raise the risk of coronary artery disease. The goal is less than 150 mg/dL.

If your numbers fall outside the healthy range, the good news is help is closer than you think! Just walk through the main entrance of any Heinen's, and you'll find it—the Produce Department.

In addition to their abundance of natural plant pigments, dietary fiber also plays a star role in optimizing heart health.

What is Dietary Fiber?

Fiber is the carbohydrate portion of a plant that you can't digest or absorb. We lack the enzymes required to break down fiber, so it travels through our digestive system unchanged, where it helps support digestive regularity, growth of beneficial bacteria, healthy cholesterol, balanced blood sugar, and a healthy weight.

Fiber Recommendations

To receive all the benefits from fiber, you should aim to get between 30 and 35 grams each day. Unfortunately, the average American takes in only 10-15 grams.

Fiber is found only in plants. And while you don't have to become a vegetarian, you can only increase fiber with these foods:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Leafy greens
- Legumes (beans, split peas, lentils)
- Nuts and seeds (almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, and chia, flax, hemp, pumpkin, and sunflower seeds, etc.)
- Whole grains (oats, barley, brown rice, quinoa, sprouted whole grain bread, etc.)

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30 Heart-Healthy Fiber-Rich Foods at Heinen's

To help you achieve the recommended 30-35 grams of fiber per day, here are the top fiber-rich foods in Heinen's Produce, Frozen, Grocery, and Wellness departments.



PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

- 1 cup sliced avocado: 10 grams
- 1 cup sliced jicama: 6 grams
- 1 medium pear with skin: 6 grams
- 1 medium apple with skin: 5 grams
- 2 cups broccoli: 5 grams
- 1 cup raw carrots: 5 grams
- 2 cups cooked kale: 5 grams
- 1 cup blueberries: 4 grams
- 1/4 cup raw almonds: 4 grams
- 1 small sweet potato with skin: 4 grams
- 1 cup Brussels sprouts: 3 grams
- 2 Fresh Energy medjool dates: 3 grams



GROCERY DEPARTMENT

- 1/2 cup cooked Heinen's lentils or split peas: 10 grams
- 1 cup Nature's Path Flax Plus Multigrain Flakes cereal: 7 grams
- Lentiful Low Sodium Vegetable Harvest instant lentils: 6 grams
- 1/4 cup One Degree sprouted steel cut oats: 5 grams
- That's It Apple & Strawberry fruit bars: 4 grams
- 1 slice Silver Hills Sprouted Power Squirrely bread: 4 grams
- 1 oz. Endangered Species Chocolate Strong + Velvety Dark Chocolate (88% Cocoa): 4 grams
- 6 Top Seedz crackers: 3 grams

2 Fiber-Filled Meal Ideas

Two staple meals that I enjoy every day are smoothies and salads. Check out the fiber content of each:

Smoothie made with
1 cup raw kale + 1 cup
frozen raspberries
+ 1 tbsp. chia (add
protein powder and
unsweetened plant-
based milk of choice)
= **17 grams of fiber**

Leafy green salad made
with chopped raw veggies
+ 1/2 cup cooked lentils
+ sliced apples or pears
(add protein of choice
and drizzle with Heinen's
extra virgin olive oil)
= **20 grams of fiber**



FROZEN DEPARTMENT

- 1 cup Heinen's frozen raspberries: 9 grams
- Blue Zones Kitchen burrito bowl: 7 grams
- Actual Veggies Black Bean veggie burger: 6 grams
- 1/2 cup Pictsweet Farms blackeye peas: 4 grams
- 1/2 cup Seapoint Farms organic shelled edamame: 4 grams
- 1 cup Grain Trust brown rice: 3 grams



WELLNESS DEPARTMENT

- 1 Olipop prebiotic soda: 9 grams
- 1 IQBar: 8 grams
- 1/4 cup Heinen's ground flaxseed: 6 grams
- 1 tablespoon Heinen's chia seeds: 5 grams

Key Takeaway

My hope is that you feel empowered to protect your precious heart by making fiber-rich foods part of every meal. I think the easiest and least intimidating place to start is with a daily salad. So, grab a bowl and fill it with leafy greens and your favorite chopped vegetables, then top it off with fresh berries or apple slices. And if you're up for the challenge, a scoop of beans, peas, or lentils. I know you can do it!

HOW FIBER FUELS YOUR GUT AND STABILIZES BLOOD SUGAR

If everyone focused on improving their gut health, disease rates would plummet. Yes, that's a bold but very true statement. And no—this has nothing to do with 6-pack abs!

Let me explain.

Our gut is home to trillions of bacteria, both good and bad. When it's full of friendly bacteria, we get to enjoy better overall health, but the opposite is true when the bad guys take over.

It makes sense to think of gas, bloating, constipation, and other digestive health problems here, because after all, we are talking about the gut! While “bathroom” issues can be a side effect of poor gut health, a less obvious problem is prolonged high blood sugar (i.e., diabetes).

Measuring Diabetes Risk

So how can you tell if you're one of the 40 million Americans suffering from diabetes? Schedule an appointment with your doctor and request a hemoglobin A1c test.

Hemoglobin A1c, or glycated hemoglobin, is a test used to screen for and diagnose diabetes and prediabetes in adults. It measures the average percentage of glucose attached to hemoglobin in red blood cells over the past 2 to 3 months. The higher the level of glucose in the

blood, the more glycated hemoglobin is formed, pointing to poor glucose control.

Here's what the numbers mean:

- Normal: 5.6 or lower
- Prediabetes: 5.7-6.4
- Diabetes: 6.5 or higher

Fiber: Your Gut's Best Friend and Blood Sugar's Secret Weapon

Diabetes is a condition caused by prolonged high blood sugar due to a problem with insulin, a hormone made by your pancreas that's responsible for carrying glucose out of your blood and into your cells.

Diabetes develops when the pancreas either makes no insulin, not enough insulin, or plenty of insulin, but the cells become resistant to it. The result in all cases is too much sugar in the blood.

So, what does this have to do with our gut?

The gut regulates blood sugar by improving insulin sensitivity. When gut health is unbalanced (called dysbiosis), it contributes to insulin resistance and higher blood sugar.

And how does fiber fit into the story?

Dietary fiber ties it all together! Beneficial gut bacteria use fiber from fruits, veggies, beans, and whole grains as fuel to grow and multiply.

In the process, they produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs)—organic compounds that help improve insulin sensitivity.

SCFAs also stimulate the release of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1), a gut hormone that boosts insulin secretion when glucose is present and signals the brain to feel full. Together, these effects slow glucose absorption and help prevent post-meal blood sugar spikes.

I can hear you now: *“All right, Mel, skip the science lecture and tell me what to eat!”*

The Best Diet for Healthy Blood Sugar

The road to a healthy gut and balanced blood sugar is the same: Increase your dietary fiber by adding whole food plants to each meal and reduce the amount of fat you eat.

The target goal is 30-35 grams of fiber per day, which works out to be around 10 grams of fiber per meal. Fiber rookies should take it slow and aim for more like 5 grams per meal, increasing as tolerated.



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HOW FIBER FUELS YOUR GUT AND STABILIZES BLOOD SUGAR

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Whether you're a fiber newbie or seasoned fan, staying well-hydrated keeps things moving and helps prevent a not-so-fun "traffic jam."

PS: To my meat-eating friends, you'll see even better blood sugar results when animal protein looks more like a small side dish than a main course.

Fiber-Filled Meal Takeaways

In addition to smoothies and salads, here are a couple more ideas to help you reach your fiber target:

1. Magic Veggie Jar: Another daily staple is my magic veggie jar—a glass Mason jar filled with a variety of colorful raw vegetables that I enjoy as a snack or with a meal. Each container comes packed with 10 grams of gut-boosting fiber and more vitamins and minerals than I can count. Give it a try for one week and I know you'll be just as hooked!

2. Power Bowls: Power Bowls are the solution when you're craving a warm, comforting meal. A nutritious bowl is one with plant-based, nutrient-rich foods as the base. These include green leafy vegetables, omega-3 fats, plant-based proteins, whole grains and functional foods like herbs and spices. The great thing about bowl-style meals is that they can be created with ingredients you have on hand, so you can enjoy a different, nutritious, and delicious meal practically every day of the week.

Key Takeaway

If you're following along, you've probably noticed the pattern — a simple way to load up on fiber: Smoothie for breakfast + salad for lunch + power bowl for dinner + magic veggie jar for a snack. Fiber power, activated!

KALE BLUEBERRY SALAD WITH PECAN CHEESE

The following recipe and photography was provided courtesy of Allianna Moximchalk from Allianna's Kitchen.



When it comes to supporting your immune system, there's nothing better than dark leafy greens, like kale. With high levels of vitamin C, kale packs a host of powerful antioxidants that can help fight off infection, so while you're enjoying this tasty kale salad, your body will be gaining the fuel it needs to keep you feeling your best!

Prep time: 10 minutes; Servings: 4

Ingredients

FOR THE SALAD

- 3 cups blueberries, washed
- 8 cups kale, chopped and stems removed, if desired
- For the Pecan Cheese
- 1/2 cup Heinen's pecans
- 1 Tbsp. Bragg nutritional yeast

FOR THE DRESSING

- 1 whole lemon, juiced
- 1/2 cup Heinen's apple cider vinegar
- 10 oz. Heinen's tahini
- 3 Tbsp. coconut aminos
- 1 Tbsp. Heinen's extra virgin olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 cup purified water

Instructions

1. Add all of the pecan cheese ingredients to a food processor and blend until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.
2. Clean the food processor, then add all of the salad dressing ingredients. Blend until smooth.
3. Add the dressing to a large serving bowl with the kale and blueberries. Toss with tongs. It is ideal to allow the kale to marinate in the dressing, as this helps break it down, but if time does not permit, do not worry.
4. Sprinkle the pecan cheese otop and serve.



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