

# Getting Enough Fiber In Your Diet Does Not Have To Be Like This!



## What is Fiber?

Fiber is indigestible carbohydrate found in plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and grain products. Your body cannot digest fiber (because our enzymes cannot break it down) and therefore passes through our body largely intact.

There are 2 categories of fiber:

- 1) Soluble Fiber
  - a. This type of fiber dissolved in water to form a gel like substance.
  - b. Main functions are to bind with fatty acids and to prolong stomach emptying time so that nutrients are better absorbed into the body
  - c. This type of fiber is contained in oats, barley, beans, peas, soybeans, apples, banana, berries, some vegetables and psyllium husk
  
- 2) Insoluble Fiber
  - a. This type of fiber does not dissolve when mixed with liquid and passes the intestines largely intact.
  - b. Its main functions are to move bulk through the intestines and balance the pH level in the intestines
  - c. Found in vegetables such as green beans and dark leafy vegetables, whole wheat products, fruit and root vegetable skins, seed and nuts

## Benefits of High Fiber Diets

- 1) Weight Management:
  - Food high in fiber often contain less calories
  - The gel like substance created by soluble fiber causes food to travel slower through the intestines, keeping you feeling full longer and reducing the amount of food you eat
  - Several studies have shown the relationship between high fiber diets and weight loss (see references)
- 2) Foods high in fiber are also often high in mineral and vitamin content
- 3) Improves bowel movement & prevents bowel disorders
  - High fiber in your diet increases stool bulk and slows transit time through the intestines
  - Stimulates wavelike contraction that moves food through your intestines
  - Helps to expand walls of colon to ease the passage of waste
  - Absorbs water in the colon to soften stool
- 4) Helps prevent or control Diabetes
  - High fiber diets have been shown to reduce the absorption of sugar into the blood
  - Studies have also shown improved insulin sensitivity, thus decrease insulin requirements for people with diabetes
- 5) Helps prevent colon cancer by keeping an optimal pH in intestines to prevent microbes from producing cancerous substances
- 6) Reduces the risk of heart disease
  - Soluble fiber binds with fats & and cholesterol and excretes it from the body – preventing them from being absorbed into the blood
  - Studies were participants consumed high fiber plus low fat diets showed the greatest reductions in cholesterol

## How Much Fiber Do We Need?

It is recommended that we eat **25-35 grams of fiber per day!**

When making a food choice decision, don't worry about whether you are getting enough of a specific type of fiber. Many foods such as oat, oat brans, psyllium husk and flax seed are rich in both insoluble and soluble fiber.



You will meet your fiber needs with at least 5 servings of fruits & vegetables and at least 3 servings of **whole** grains!

## How Do You Know How Much You Have Eaten?

Here are some general guidelines you can use in estimating the amount of fiber in your diet and some examples of foods high in fiber in each food group.

(Note: the amount for the different examples is not the same.)



### Fruits

2-3 grams per 1 medium sized fruit or ½ cup fruit

Examples:

- ½ cup raspberries 4.6 grams
- 1 medium apple or pear with skin 4g
- 3 dried figs 10.5g
- 1 large orange 2.4g
- 1 small banana 2.2g



### Vegetables & Legumes

2-3 grams per ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw vegetable

4-7g per ½ cup cooked for vegetable proteins, such as beans

Examples:

- ½ cup cooked Kidney Beans 7g
- ½ cup cooked lentils 5g
- ½ cup green peas 4g
- ½ cup cooked broccoli 2.4g
- 1 medium baked potato with skin 4.8g





### Grains

3-5 grams per ½ cup cooked whole grain

Examples:

- 1/3 cup all bran cereal 8.5g
- 1 slice of wheat bread 1.5g (vs. 1 slice white bread @ 0.6g)
- ½ cup brown rice 2.4g (vs. ½ cup white rice @ 0.8g)



### Nuts & Seeds

1-2 grams for about 2 tablespoons

Examples:

- ¼ cup Almonds 2.4g
- 1 oz (tablespoon) Pecans 3g
- 1 cup shredded Coconut 7.2g
- 1 tbsp Flaxseeds 3.4g
- 1 tbsp Pistachios 2.9g
- 1 Tbsp roasted peanuts 1.1g

### Tips on How to Incorporate High Fiber Foods into Your Diet:

- Choose whole grains – whole wheat has more than twice the fiber content of white flour!
- Choose brown rice instead of white
- Eat the whole fruit instead of juice (one large orange has 2.4g of fiber, while ¾ cup of orange juice has 0.4g)
- Start your morning with hot or cold cereals with at least 4g of fiber (bran cereals)
- Pack cut-up fruit or raw vegetables for snacking
- Use beans (kidney, pinto, black, etc) or lentils in salads, soups and stews
- Eating at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables and at least 3 servings of whole grains every day will likely provide all the fiber you need.

## Words of Caution: Are there drawbacks to high fiber diets?

If you suddenly and greatly increase your fiber intake you may suffer digestive distress, and even diarrhea.

Introduce more fiber into your diet gradually and gradually build on your intake.

Increase your water intake as you increase fiber consumption.

Exercise (including yoga, stretching and walking) can encourage the wavelike contraction in your colon and help your colon function.

Some people are concerned that large amounts of fiber can bind to certain minerals, such as calcium and iron, and other nutrients and keep them from becoming absorbed. Although possible, this is of little concern if you eat a balanced diet that includes a variety of grains and breads. People with high fiber diets are also getting sufficient amounts of these minerals and nutrients from the healthy foods they eat.



## Water & Fiber

Water and fiber work as a team in our body.

Water is absorbed by fiber, allowing waste products to move freely through the digestive tract, and thus preventing toxins and waste from accumulating.

High amounts of fiber without sufficient water intake can prevent the transit of stool through the intestines, potentially causing intestinal blockage and/or aggravating constipation

Therefore, **without sufficient water, fiber cannot do its job!**

Make sure you drink plenty of water to help process your fiber!



## Processed Foods and Fiber

Most of us do not have the time to always consume fresh foods and sometimes grab foods in boxes and cans off the grocery store shelf.

Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Brown Bread does not necessarily mean whole grains, neither do terms like “multi-grain,” “wheat,” “5-grain,” or “rye”. Some bread is colored brown with ingredients such as “caramel coloring. Only bread labeled “Whole Wheat” truly uses whole-wheat flour. Look for the word “whole”!
- When eating store-bought foods, check the nutrition information labels for the amounts of dietary fiber in each product. Aim for 3-5 grams of fiber per serving.

Nutrition Facts	
Servings Per Container 4	
Amount per serving ½ cup	
Calories 90	Calories from Fat 30
% Daily value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 3g	5%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 300mg	13%
<b>Total Carbohydrates</b> 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	12%
<b>Protein</b> 3g	4%
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%
Calcium 4%	Iron 4%

## Fiber Supplements

Fiber supplements may be helpful addition to a healthy diet. They can soften stool and ease constipation and daily and long term use can be recommended for people with digestive problems.

However, they should not be used as substitute for high-fiber foods. These fiber supplements only contain soluble fiber and NOT insoluble fiber, which plays an important role in our body, and lacks the antioxidants and other nutrients essential to health.

If you take fiber supplements, however, make sure to drink plenty of water or other fluids every day. Without enough fluids, fiber supplements can actually cause or make constipation worse.



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