



FIBER FACTS

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, Americans eat an average of 5 to 14 grams of daily fiber daily, short of the 20 to 35 grams recommended by the American Dietetic Association.

What is fiber?

Fiber is the part of fruits, vegetables, and grains that the body cannot digest. Soluble fiber dissolves easily in water and takes on a soft, gel-like texture in the intestines. Insoluble fiber passes through the intestine almost unchanged. Each functions differently and provides different health benefits. The bulk and soft texture of fiber help prevent hard, dry stools that are difficult to pass.

What does it do?

Insoluble fiber promotes normal elimination by providing bulk for stool formation and helping the passage of stool through the colon. It holds onto water, helping move waste through the body and decreasing the time that potentially harmful substances stay in the colon. Insoluble fiber also helps to satisfy appetite by creating a full feeling.

Soluble fiber has been shown to help lower blood cholesterol. A 1999 study of U.S. women, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that a diet high in fiber, particularly breakfast cereals, can reduce a woman's risk of developing coronary heart disease by up to 23%. Fiber may regulate blood sugar by delaying the stomach emptying, which slows sugar absorption after a meal and may reduce the amount of insulin needed.

Adding fiber to the diet is not only an excellent way to combat constipation, but may also help prevent colorectal, breast and other cancers, diabetes, may lower cholesterol and decrease the risk of coronary heart disease. A large study of almost 75,000 women demonstrated that middle aged women with the greatest dietary fiber intake gained less weight than those with smaller dietary fiber intake, independent of other factors.

With so many potential benefits, no risks and no side effects, increasing fiber is something women can do for themselves. It will require some perseverance and creativity to obtain the recommended amount of dietary fiber, but is a challenge worth taking.

How do I start?

To prevent gas and bloating, gradually add fiber over a 3 week period. Remember to drink plenty of water and fluids as you add fiber (no more than 6 eight ounce glasses of fluid a day). You should increase the fiber in all three of your meals in order to get the daily recommended amount.

What are some easy ways to increase dietary fiber?

Many commercial oat bran and wheat bran products (muffins, chips, waffles) actually contain very little bran but may be high in sodium, total fat and saturated fat. Read the labels! Fiber supplements are available, but eating fiber-rich foods is the best way to receive maximum benefits and obtain necessary nutrients. Consider the suggestions listed below to add fiber to your diet.

1. Grains

Add bran or bran buds to your morning cereal or oat meal, or choose All-Bran, Bran Buds, Total, Raisin Bran, Most or Bran Flakes cereal. Fiber One cereal has 14 g of dietary fiber per bowl!

Choose 100% whole wheat or another whole grain (check the labels) bread for your sandwich. All breads are not equal in fiber – you may as well choose a high fiber one.

Substitute brown or wild rice, or bulgur for white rice.

Substitute at least ½ of your white flour with whole-grain flour.

2. Dry beans or lentils

Add garbanzo beans to salads, or substitute them in other bean dishes. *(continued next page)*

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Rinse and add canned black, pinto or kidney beans to rice.

Add black beans and corn kernels to salsa.

Make tacos with fat-free refried beans instead of meat.

Add canned beans or lentils to vegetable soup.

Baked beans, kidney beans, split peas, dried limas, garbanzos, pinto beans and black beans are excellent sources of fiber. Substitute these for meat 2-3 times a week, or use in chili, soups, or stews instead of meat.

3. Eat the whole fruit or vegetable

Make a "fruit soup" by stewing prunes, apricots, raisins, and other dried fruit. Eat as a snack, put on cooked oatmeal, or add to uncooked oatmeal for muesli.

Try dried fruits as a snack, especially when fresh fruit is out of season.

Sprinkle your morning cereal or oatmeal with 1/4 cup chopped dates, prunes, dried apricots or raisins.

When eating a baked potato, try topping with salsa or diced tomatoes, peppers and onion, and eat the potato skin.

Vegetables that are excellent sources of fiber are corn, broccoli, carrots, Brussels sprouts and greens, fresh or frozen lima beans or green peas, green snap beans and pole beans.

4. Select raw fruits and vegetables

Add some fresh spinach leaves to your lettuce salad, as well as raw sliced carrots, cauliflower and broccoli. You can also add beets, chickpeas, raisins, sunflower seeds or other nuts, and chopped apples.

Keep washed, prepared fruits and vegetables ready to nibble.

Apples, pears and plums (with the skin), oranges, bananas and berries (black, blue, rasp and straw) are good fresh fruit choices

Add fresh spinach leaves, tomatoes, sprouts, cucumbers, peppers to your sandwich.

Stir fry (with the peels) carrots, cauliflower, cabbage, okra, peas, snow peas, squash, sweet potato, zucchini or broccoli, and add some beans, almonds or pine nuts.

5. Drink plenty of fluids (6 eight ounce glasses per day)

6. Consider adding natural psyllium, such as found in Metamucil.

Try making a smoothie with 1/3 cup lemonade, 1/3 cup fresh strawberries or other fruit, 1/3 cup ice and 1 tsp sugar free orange Metamucil. Each dose of Metamucil adds 3 grams of fiber to your daily dietary intake.

(recommended by the FiberWise website: www.metamucil.com)
