

Fantastic Fiber

Are You Getting Enough?

Eating more fiber may significantly reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity. The fiber in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes (beans, lentils, and nuts) has been a mainstay of the human diet for thousands of years. Since the beginning of the 20th century, however, Americans have been eating less and less fiber.

Nutrition experts recommend getting 25 – 40 grams of fiber every day or 15 – 20 grams per 1,000 calories. Our national average? Just 11 – 13 grams a day.

Fiber, a complex carbohydrate, is generally defined as the part of a plant that cannot be digested. Thus, it adds virtually no calories to the diet. This is the reason some manufacturers subtract fiber from the carbohydrate content of foods.

There are two types of dietary fiber; *soluble* and *insoluble*.

Soluble Fiber is dissolved or absorbed in water. For example, most fruits, oat-containing foods, legumes, and seeds contain soluble fiber. It can lower cholesterol and help manage blood glucose. An intake of 3 grams of soluble fiber from oats is recommended to reduce blood cholesterol levels by 5%. One and one-half cups of cooked oatmeal or one cup of cooked oat bran provides 3 grams. The fiber forms a gel and binds to cholesterol and excretes it from the body.

Soluble fiber also delays the movement of food into the small intestine, which slows post-meal surges in blood sugar. This is of benefit to diabetics and those of us who want our food to be more slowly absorbed into the blood stream in order to avoid spikes in blood sugar. Research shows that instant fiber, in the form of 1 teaspoon of psyllium (sugar-free Metamucil) in 1 cup of water before each meal can drop blood sugar levels from 210 to 140 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl).

Insoluble fiber does not completely dissolve in water. Wheat bran, corn bran, whole-grain breads and cereals, vegetables, fruit skins, and nuts contain insoluble fiber. This type of fiber adds bulk and helps satisfy appetites longer. Insoluble fiber promotes regularity and keeps waste products moving through the digestive tract.

Finally, a nice bonus that comes with bulky, high-fiber foods is help with weight control. Fiber, especially when it is saturated with water, fills you up without adding calories. Foods with fiber also take longer to chew, which helps slow down the rate at which you eat.

To sum up the Benefits of Fiber:

- **Essentially non-caloric.**
- **Helps to fill you up on fewer calories.**
- **Slows the absorption of food by the body and stabilizes blood sugar levels.**
- **Helps keep appetites satisfied longer.**
- **Helps the body absorb less fat and cholesterol from the foods you eat.**
- **By lowering cholesterol absorption from food and reducing cholesterol production by the body, dietary fiber helps protect the cardiovascular system.**
- **Promotes proper waste removal**
- **Maintains gut and immune system health by promoting growth of friendly, healthy bacteria in the gut.**
- **Found in foods rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.**

Remember:

- **Increase fiber slowly.**
- **Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day (unless you are fluid restricted).**
- **Use Beano, a food enzyme, if you have problems digesting legumes.**

Fiber Boosters

- ✓ Eat more whole-grain bread. Look for the word “whole grain,” or “whole wheat” on packages.
- ✓ Eat brown rice instead of white
- ✓ Eat low-fat popcorn instead of potato chips
- ✓ Choose whole fruits over juice and fresh or frozen over canned
- ✓ Snack on dried fruits and nuts (be sure to watch portions)
- ✓ Eat fruits and vegetables with the skin on
- ✓ Plan a cooked vegetable and a salad with dinner
- ✓ Substitute legumes (such as beans or peanuts/peanut butter) for meat at least twice a week. Add legumes to soups and salads.
- ✓ Choose a high-fiber cereal for breakfast or mix a high-fiber cereal with your favorite brand. Add some fruit
- ✓ Use whole-grain flour in recipes such as whole wheat
- ✓ If you are over 65 or have had gastrointestinal surgery, consult with your physician before adding fiber to your diet.

35 Grams and Counting

Here is what 35 grams of fiber looks like in real food

BREAKFAST:

High-fiber cereal	1 oz.	12 grams of fiber
Banana	½	1 gram

LUNCH:

Whole-wheat bread	2 slices	4 grams
Lettuce	1 leaf	1 gram
Tomato	2 slices	1 gram
Pear	1 medium	4 grams

DINNER:

Sweet potato	1	4 grams
Cooked broccoli	½ cup	2 grams
Lettuce salad	1 cup	1 gram
Strawberries	1 cup	3 grams

SNACK:

Peanuts	1 ounce	3 grams
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TOTAL **36 grams**

Calculating Fiber Intake

How many servings of the foods below do you consume on a daily basis?*

<i>Food:</i>	<i>Serving Size:</i>	<i>Grams Fiber:</i>	<i>Total Fiber Intake:</i>
Beans/legumes (such as kidney, pinto, navy) Lentils <i>1/2 cup</i>	_____	x 6 =	_____
Bran cereal (such as All Bran or Fiber One) <i>1/2 cup</i>	_____	x 6-14 =	_____
Whole grain cereal (such as oatmeal, bran flakes) <i>1/2 cup</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
Whole grain bread (such as 100% whole wheat, whole grain rye) <i>1 slice</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
Whole grains (such as brown rice, whole wheat pasta) <i>1 cup, cooked</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
Starchy vegetables (such as potatoes, corn, peas) <i>1/2 cup cooked</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
Non-starchy vegetables (such as broccoli, asparagus) <i>1/2 cup</i>	_____	x 2 =	_____
Fruit (whole, not juice) <i>1/2 cup chopped, or 1 whole</i>	_____	x 2 =	_____
Nuts/seeds (such as peanuts, almonds, sunflower seeds) <i>1 oz. (approximately 1/4 cup)</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
Peanut butter/almond butter <i>2 Tablespoons</i>	_____	x 3 =	_____
		TOTAL:	_____

**If foods are consumed less than daily (but at least once a week), calculate the fiber grams for that serving, multiply by the number of days/week that food is consumed, and divide by 7 (to get the daily average). Then total all foods together.*