



Fiber - The Whole Story

Fiber – The story begins. Fiber gives plant foods their structure while they are growing and gives them crunch or texture when they are eaten. Your body cannot digest or use most types of fiber. This is why we once called fiber roughage. You'll find fiber in vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans and whole grain breads and cereals. These foods supply both soluble and insoluble fiber, the two basic kinds of dietary fiber.

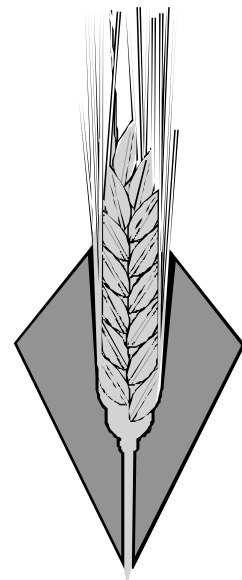
Fiber - Act 1 Insoluble fiber helps keep you regular and prevents constipation. Soluble fiber helps you digest foods more slowly and may affect blood glucose and blood cholesterol levels. Should you worry about eating a certain amount of each type of fiber? Not really since fiber-rich foods contain both types and both types are important.

Fiber - Act 2 It's more important to eat plenty of different kinds of whole plant foods. Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts and beans are more than fiber-rich foods. They also provide other healthy nutrients that complete the fiber story:

- ✓ vitamins and minerals like iron, folate and other B-vitamins needed for growth
- ✓ antioxidants like vitamin E and vitamin C that can help prevent cell damage
- ✓ complex carbohydrates needed for energy
- ✓ monounsaturated fats for heart health
- ✓ phytochemicals (special nutrients) that help fight diseases

Big benefits - the unfolding story Fiber-rich foods are best known for helping you prevent constipation, hemorrhoids and diverticulosis. But that is not all. Due to these other disease fighting nutrients, fiber-rich diets:

- ◆ May reduce risk of some diseases
 - ✓ heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure
 - ✓ cancers of the stomach, colon and rectum
 - ✓ type 2 diabetes
- ◆ Can help with weight control by making us feel full longer with fewer calories
- ◆ Can help with diabetes management through better blood glucose control



The bottom-line How much fiber is enough? Most healthy adults should eat 20 to 35 grams of fiber per day. Are most adults eating this much fiber? No, most eat only around 11 grams daily. How can you increase the amount of fiber you eat? By building your healthy base from the Food Guide Pyramid - with grains, vegetables and fruits. You will get more than 20 grams of fiber if you eat your minimum servings from these groups.

Here are five ways to get started:

1. Eat 6 - 11 servings of breads, cereals, rice, pasta, tortillas and other grains daily. Make at least three of your choices whole grain. Look on the ingredient list for a whole grain as the first ingredient.

Look for and try:

- ✓ 100% whole wheat flour, whole ground corn, whole oats or oatmeal
- ✓ less common grains like brown rice, barley, bulgar, quinoa, buckwheat
- ✓ whole grain cereals with 5 or more grams of fiber per serving

2. Eat at least 5 - 9 servings of vegetables and fruits daily. Eat a variety of whole veggies and fruits more often than juices for more fiber. For extra fiber, eat apples, potatoes and other veggies and fruits with their skins. Dried fruits are also a good source of fiber.

3. Eat beans and nuts at least 3 - 5 times a week for a fiber boost. Cooked beans are a fiber powerhouse with 7 grams of fiber in a half cup. Nuts pack in 3 grams of fiber per 1/4-cup serving. Snack on nuts sometimes or toss them onto veggies and salads for flavor and crunch. Work bean dishes into your weekly meals or stretch soups, casseroles or chili by adding more beans and less meat.

4. Read tips 1 - 3 again before taking fiber tablets or powders. While fiber tablets and powders supply concentrated fiber and may help with constipation, they are missing the additional nutrients found in whole foods. Tablets and powders are easy to overdo.

5. Slowly increase your fiber intake and drink plenty of water. Increase your fiber intake slowly to give your stomach time to adjust. Also, drink eight or more glasses of fluids daily to avoid excess gas and stomach discomfort from the higher fiber diet.

Final chapter It is up to you to finish the whole fiber story. Eat a variety of fiber-rich whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans and nuts and don't forget the water.

ACTION PLAN

1. These are two ways I will eat more whole grains this week: _____

2. I plan to eat beans _____ times a week.

3. This is how I plan to eat more vegetables at lunch and dinner: _____

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