

## **FIBER IN YOUR DIET**

### **WHAT IS FIBER?**

Fiber is the portion of plant foods that our bodies cannot absorb or digest. Fiber is found primarily in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains. There is no fiber in foods that come from animals, such as meat, milk, cheese, and yogurt.

There are two basic types of fiber:

1. *Insoluble Fiber*
  - a. This is the kind of fiber that's sometimes referred to as "roughage". It includes the woody or structural part of plants, such as fruit and vegetable skins and the outer coating (the bran) of the wheat kernel.
2. *Soluble Fiber*
  - a. Soluble fibers are substances that dissolve and thicken in water to form gels. Oats, peas, beans, barley, apples, and citrus fruits all contain soluble fiber, and oat bran is an especially rich source.

### **Why Is Fiber Good For You?**

Fiber attracts and absorbs water. Think of the solid waste in your intestine as a dry sponge. A dry sponge is dry and hard. When it is soaked with water it softens and expands. The same thing happens to the waste in your intestine when you have adequate fiber in your diet. It attracts water and softens and expands the solid waste, thus speeding up the elimination process. This combats constipation and helps to prevent cancers of the digestive system such as intestinal, stomach, and colon cancer. Besides preventing constipation, fiber has many other health benefits, including:

1. **LOWERS RISK OF DIGESTIVE DISORDERS**
  - a. Fiber can also prevent other digestive disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, hemorrhoids, and diverticulitis.
2. **LOWERS BLOOD CHOLESTEROL LEVELS**
  - a. The soluble fiber found in beans, oats, and flaxseed has been shown to help lower "LDL" or bad cholesterol.
3. **HELPS MAINTAIN BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS**
  - a. Fiber slows the absorption of sugar, which helps control blood sugar levels. This is especially important in helping to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
4. **AIDS IN WEIGHT LOSS AND WEIGHT CONTROL**
  - a. There are several reasons that a high-fiber diet helps to control weight. First of all, most high-fiber foods generally take more time to chew, which gives to time to recognize when you've had enough to eat and you're no longer hungry. Secondly, high-fiber foods are less "energy- dense", which means they have fewer calories for the same amount of foods that

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are more “energy-dense”. Think of a large bowl of salad greens (not including the dressing) for only about 60 calories versus the average candy bar for about 250 calories. You get to eat and chew much more food eating the salad than the candy bar for far fewer calories. And finally, fiber fills you up and will help you stay full longer than a low-fiber diet of highly processed foods.

### **HOW MUCH FIBER DO YOU NEED?**

The American Cancer Society recommends a range of 20-35 grams of fiber daily. If you aren't getting enough fiber in your diet, or if you are only getting at the lower end of this range (20 grams) you need to increase your fiber intake gradually. Changing from a very low-fiber diet to a very high-fiber diet suddenly may cause some intestinal distress (tummy ache!), so make the change gradually. If you need to add fiber to your diet, you need to increase your intake of:

- Whole-grain products
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Peas, beans, and other legumes
- Nuts and seeds

Refined and processed foods contain little or no fiber, so in order to increase fiber in your diet you must decrease your intake of:

- White bread
- White grain foods such as white rice, white pasta, etc.
- Non-whole-grain cereals
- Snack foods made from enriched flour such as crackers, pop-tarts, cookies, etc

### **TIPS FOR ADDING MORE FIBER TO YOUR DIET**

1. Look for the words whole-grain rather than enriched in ingredient lists.
2. Look for the words “bran” or “fiber” in the name of products, such as Raisin Bran cereal or Fiber One Bars.
3. Substitute half whole-wheat flour when making pancakes, biscuits, pizza crust, and even cookies.
4. Keep a bowl of fruit readily available for snacks.
5. Cut up raw vegetables as soon as you bring them home from the store and store them in ziplock bags or plastic containers.
6. At the salad bar add beans and seeds rather than cheese and croutons to your salad.