

What Are The Health Benefits of Fiber in the Diet?

What is fiber?

Fiber is an indigestible substance that is found mainly in the outer layer of plants. It is a special type of carbohydrate that passes through the human digestive system virtually unchanged; without being broken down into nutrients.

Why is fiber important?

- A food that is high in fiber requires that the food is more thoroughly chewed. Consequently, fiber slows down the eating process and can contribute to a feeling of being full, which can, in turn, help prevent obesity and overeating.
- Fiber slows digestion and absorption so glucose (sugar) enters the bloodstream more slowly, which keeps blood sugar at a more stable level. This is thought to be key in helping to prevent diabetes.
- Fiber is broken down in the colon and the acids that are produced help to nourish the lining of the colon.
- Fiber absorbs water and helps to keep the contents of the intestine moving. This is important in the prevention of constipation.

What foods contain large amounts of fiber?

- All natural cereals
- Whole grain breads
- Beans
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Nuts

It is important to know that only plants produce fiber; no matter how “chewy” or “tough” an animal product may be, it does not contain fiber!

A diet high in fiber can help lower the risk of developing many adverse health conditions:

1. **Heart Disease** - Evidence continues to grow that supports the claim that foods that contain soluble fiber (oat, rye, beans) can have a positive influence on lowering cholesterol, triglycerides and reducing other particles in the blood that may cause heart disease. Some fruits and vegetables, such as citrus fruits and carrots have been shown to be effective in the prevention of heart disease as well.
2. **Cancer** - The passage of food through the body is quickened when a diet high in fiber is consumed. Studies have shown that the hastened movement of harmful products through the colon may help to protect against colon cancer. Other types of cancer that may



be prevented by a fiber-rich diet include breast, ovarian and uterine.

3. **Diabetes** - As mentioned previously, the addition of fiber to the diet helps to regulate blood sugar levels, which is important in the prevention of diabetes. In addition, many people with diabetes may be able to stabilize and reduce their blood sugar levels by following a diet rich in fiber.
4. **Diverticular Disease** - This is a disease where small pouches develop in the wall of the colon. When these pouches call diverticula become inflamed, the condition known as diverticulosis can occur. This condition can result in a great deal of pain, discomfort and diarrhea. Following a high fiber diet can help move food through the colon at a faster rate, thus preventing inflammation of existing pouches.

To summarize, following a diet plan that contains adequate fiber is beneficial. The Institute of Medicine recommends that children and adults consume 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories of food they eat each day.

For a list of the fiber in some of the foods we eat, see the page at right. Eat healthy, be well.

Marla Caplon, MdsNA Nutrition Chair

Where's the Fiber?

See the chart below for fiber content for some common foods. Each item lists portion size, calories, then fiber in grams.

Almonds

slivered, 1 tbsp, 14, 0.6
sliced, 1/4 cup, 56, 2.4

Apple

raw, 1 med, 70, 4.0
applesauce, 2/3 cup, 182, 3.6

Asparagus

cooked, small spears, 1/2 cup, 17, 1.7

Banana, 1 med 8", 96, 3.0

Beans

black, cooked, 1 cup, 190, 19.4
Great Northern, 1 cup, 160, 16.0
kidney beans,
canned, 1/2 cup, 94, 9.7
cooked, 1 cup, 188, 19.4

Bread

cracked wheat, 2 slices, 120, 3.6
high-bran "health" bread, 2 slices,
120-160, 7.0
white, 2 slices, 160, 1.9
dark rye (whole grain),
2 slices, 108, 5.8
pumpnickel, 2 slices, 116, 4.0
seven-grain, 2 slices, 111-140, 6.5
whole wheat, 2 slices, 120, 6.0

Broccoli

raw, 1/2 cup, 20, 4.0
frozen, 4 spears, 20, 5.0
fresh, cooked, 3/4 cup, 30, 7.0

Cantaloupe

1/4, 38, 1.0

Carrots

raw, slivered (4-5 sticks)
1/4 cup, 10, 1.7
cooked, 1/2 cup, 20, 3.4

Cauliflower

raw, chopped, 3 tiny buds, 10, 1.2
cooked, chopped, 7/8 cup, 16, 2.3

Chickpeas (garbanzos)

canned, 1/2 cup, 86, 6.0
cooked, 1 cup, 172, 12.0

Crackers

graham, 2, 53, 1.4
Ry-Krisp, 3, 64, 2.3
Triscuits, 2, 50, 2.0
Wheat Thins, 6, 58, 2.2

Cucumber, raw

unpeeled, 10 thin sl, 12, 0.7

Grapefruit

1/2 (avg. size), 30, 0.8

Grapes

white, 20, 75, 1.0
red or black, 15-20, 65, 1.0

Greens, cooked

collards, beet greens, dandelion, kale,
Swiss chard, turnip greens
1/2 cup, 20, 4.0

Honeydew melon

3" slice, 42, 1.5

Lentils

brown, raw, 1/3 cup, 144, 5.5
brown, cooked, 2/3 cup, 144, 5.5

Lettuce

(Boston, leaf, iceberg)
shredded, 1 cup, 5, 0.8

Macaroni

whole wheat, cooked
1 cup, 200, 5.7
regular, frozen with cheese, baked
10 oz, 506, 2.2

Muffins

English, whole wheat
1 whole, 125, 3.7
bran, whole wheat
2, 136, 4.6

Mushrooms

raw, 5 small, 4, 1.4
sauteed or baked with 2 tsp diet marg.
4 large, 45, 2.0

Noodles

whole wheat egg, 1 cup, 200, 5.7
spinach whole wheat
1 cup, 200, 6.0

Orange

1 lg, 70, 2.4
1 sm, 35, 1.2

Peach

raw, 1 med, 38, 2.3
canned in light syrup
2 halves, 70, 1.4

Peanuts

dry roasted, 1 tbsp, 52, 1.1

Pear

1 med, 88, 4.0

Peas

green, fresh or frozen
1/2 cup, 60, 9.1

Peppers

green sweet, raw, 2 tbsp, 4, 0.3
green sweet, cooked
1/2 cup, 13, 1.2

Pineapple

fresh, cubed, 1/2 cup, 41, 0.8
canned, 1 cup, 58-74, 0.8

Plums

2 or 3 sm, 38-45, 2.0

Popcorn (no oil, butter or margarine)

1 cup, 20, 1.0

Potatoes

Idaho, baked, 1 sm (6 oz), 120, 4.2

Raisins

1 tbsp, 29, 1.0

Rice

white (before cooking)
1/2 cup, 79, 2.0
brown (before cooking)
1/2 cup, 83, 5.5
instant, 1 serv, 79, 0.7

Spaghetti

whole wheat, plain, 1 cup, 200, 5.6

Yams (orange fleshed sweet potato)

cooked or baked in skin
1 med (6oz), 156, 6.8