



Work Smart Live Smart

Fantastic Fibre

By
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When people think of fibre, they often think of dietary supplements, with the tag line, "Helps keep you regular!" In truth, fibre does a lot more than that. The positive effects of fibre are abundant, and not to be found in a jar.

The October 27, 1999 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that fibre-eating young adults had lower cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, and were less likely to be overweight and develop diabetes. Fibre has also been positively linked to reducing the risk of heart attack, colon cancer and considered the best defence against diverticulitis (a painful condition of inflamed out-pouches in the intestinal walls).

Healthy living starts with incorporating fibre-rich foods like whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables into our diet. The benefits from a high fibre diet may be related to the foods themselves, not fibre alone. Along with the fibre in these foods, you will also be consuming a host of other disease fighting substances like antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. For this reason, it is best to get fibre from food sources rather than supplements.

WHAT IS FIBRE?

Fibre put simply is indigestible carbohydrate. Humans do not possess the enzymes needed to digest some parts of the plant food we eat - like seeds on berries or the shells on kernels of corn. You may be wondering how it can be useful if you cannot digest it. That is its usefulness. The bulk that fibre leaves in the digestive system helps it to operate at its best.

Dietary fibre comes in two forms:

SOLUBLE FIBRE

Called soluble because of its ability to dissolve in water, it is found in:

- Fruits
- Some legumes
- Grains such as Oats, Barley, and Rye

In the digestive tract the soluble fibre dissolves in water and forms a gel. The gel slows the rate that food moves through the small intestine (where almost all of your nutrients are absorbed). It is also known to lower cholesterol by promoting the excretion of bile (made of cholesterol) from your body, and slows the absorption of cholesterol and fats while it increases the amount of other more rapidly used fatty acids.

INSOLUBLE FIBRE

Acts somewhat opposite to soluble as it absorbs water. Insoluble fibre is

- Vegetables
- Wheat bran

As it absorbs water, it increases the bulk of the material moving through your large intestine. This causes it to move through your colon faster otherwise known as gastrointestinal motility or "being regular"

As you can see, both of these types of fibre are essential for the proper functioning of our digestive system.

Although fibre is so rampantly spread throughout a variety of food sources, we are presently consuming about 1/2 the amount recommended.

- It is recommended that we consume 20-30 g fibre daily.
- Current typical intakes sit at 15 g for men and 10g for women

It is not recommended that we exceed the recommended amount. Overdosing on fibre can have some unpleasant side effects like gassiness, bloatedness, and diarrhoea. Therefore it is important not to go overboard when trying to incorporate fibre into the diet.

Gradually increase your fibre intake over a period of two weeks. Also, because increased fibre also means increased fluid used by your body, always follow increases in fibre with increased water consumption. Drink at least 8 cups a day to prevent fibre-related discomfort.

HOW TO START?

The best way to start increasing the fibre in your diet is to start with a complete breakfast. A good breakfast could consist of high fibre cereal, whole grain toast, two servings of fruit (not just juice) and low-fat dairy products. Healthy diets that begin with a solid breakfast have the following effects:

- You better your chance of reaching your recommended 5+ servings of fruits and vegetables a day, which lowers your risk of developing heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases.
- High fibre breakfast cereals are usually fortified; therefore, you are more likely to meet your nutrient needs for the day.
- High fibre breakfasts help you to lose weight as fibre slows the digestive system which helps ward off hunger pangs later. In addition, fibre helps you to feel full faster, so you eat less at a sitting. You can lose weight by changing the type of foods you eat rather than the amount.

SOME MORE TIPS FOR INCORPORATING FIBRE INTO EVERYDAY LIVING

- Include fibre in your baking - bran in muffins, whole-wheat in cakes, or fruit like raisins, apples with the skin on, dates or apricots that add flavour and moistness as well as fibre.
- Boost your salads with fibrous raw options like broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, dried fruits and beans such as chick peas, or kidney.
- Choose whole grain breads- like whole wheat, rye or mixed grain.
- When serving dinner, load your plate with the vegetables first then the meat. The different perspective may give your fibre intake an edge.
- Use whole-wheat pastas, or whole grain side dishes like couscous or bulgur.
- Add bran to meatloaves and meatballs.
- Add beans and lentils to your pasta dishes easily - kidney beans in Texas style pasta, or chickpeas in a pasta salad, or lentils in an Indian style rice dish. (Unfortunately even brown rice does not add much fibre to the diet.)
- Green peas are an excellent fibre choice as a side dish, soup or in casseroles.
- Other soups can be high in fibre - split pea, minestrone, beef and barley.
- Use all of your potato, when you bake it eat the skin too.
- Fruit crisps give you a double dose if you use oatmeal in the topping.
- For snacks- raisins, fig bars, other fruits are good sources of fibre.

FIBRE-RICH FOODS - *Incorporate some of these foods everyday to increase your fibre intake*

Excellent Sources

(4.5 g or more/serving)

Good Sources

(2-4 g/ serving)

BREADS AND CEREALS

All-Bran (1/3 cup)
100 % Bran (1/3 cup)
Grape Nuts (1/2 cup)
100 % Whole Wheat Bread (2 slices)
Oatmeal (1 cup prepared)

Muffets (1-2 biscuits)
Bran Flakes (1/3 cup)
Shreddies (1/2 cup)
Shredded Wheat (1-2 biscuits)

VEGETABLES

Beans, baked and canned (1/2 cup)
Beans, soaked and boiled (1/2 cup)
Lima beans (1/2 cup)

Corn (kernels from 2 ears)
Green peas (1/2 cup)
Spinach (1/2 cup)
Sweet potato (1)
Lentils, boiled (1/2 cup)
Potato, baked (1)
Parsnips (1/2 cup)
Brussels Sprouts (8)
Green or yellow beans (1/2 cup)

FRUITS

Prunes, dried raw (6)
Apricots, dried halves (6)
Figs, dried (2)

Avocado (1/2)
Berries with seeds (1/2 cup)
Dates (10)
Raisins (1/2 cup)
Apple or pear, raw skin on (1)
Orange (1)

NUTS

Almonds, Brazil nuts, Peanuts (1/2 cup)

Walnuts (1/2 cup)

For more information and sources:

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