

The Facts on Fiber



According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, “more than 90 percent of women and 97 percent of men do not meet recommended intakes for dietary fiber.” Despite notable benefits to adequate fiber intake, many Americans struggle to meet their daily fiber goals. To take advantage of the benefits, understanding what fiber is and where to find it is essential.

What is Dietary Fiber?

To put it simply, dietary fiber is the part of plants that the body cannot digest or absorb. Instead, fiber passes through the gastrointestinal tract and moves out of the body through waste.

Fiber is commonly identified as either soluble or insoluble - both yielding their own unique benefits.

Soluble Fiber

Known for its viscous property, soluble fiber helps bind to cholesterol to effectively remove it from the body. This is especially helpful in lowering LDL cholesterol, otherwise known as the “bad” cholesterol.

Eating 5-10 grams of soluble fiber each day can help lower LDL cholesterol by 5-11 points. Remember to increase fiber gradually and make sure to drink plenty of water to avoid problems with gas.

Insoluble Fiber

Insoluble fiber is helpful for individuals struggling with constipation as it helps bulk up stool and promote movement through the gastrointestinal tract.

Benefits of Focusing on Fiber

Although commonly known to regulate bowel movements, fiber has many other health benefits that make consuming adequate amounts worth the effort. This includes helping to maintain a healthy weight, which in effect can help lower your risk of diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.

10 Ways to Increase Daily Fiber Intake

1. Add fiber to the foods you already eat
 - Sprinkle oat bran or rice bran on cereal
 - Add almonds to salad
 - Include beans in soup
 - Mix ground flaxseed into muffins
2. Eat whole fruit rather than drinking juice
 - Prunes and pears are especially high in fiber
3. Include other fruits high in fiber
 - One medium apple, banana, guava, orange, or peach
 - Two apricots or plums
 - ½ cup mangoes

- Three prunes
 - One cup raspberries, blackberries, or strawberries
4. Select vegetables with lots of soluble fiber, such as Brussels sprouts, acorn squash, lima beans, broccoli, cabbage, green beans, onions, parsnips, turnips, carrots, okra, and eggplant
 5. Look for whole grain products, especially those with oats and barley
 6. Add vegetables to sandwiches or eat a peanut butter sandwich on whole grain bread
 7. Have bean dip or hummus for snacks
 8. Consume healthy fats with one or more grams of soluble fiber are 2 tablespoons avocado, 1 tablespoons whole chia seeds, and 2 tablespoons ground flax seeds
 9. Eat lean protein foods that have fiber like beans (black beans, navy beans, kidney beans, lima beans, pinto beans), chickpeas, black-eyed peas, and soybeans
 10. A natural fiber supplement like psyllium, a plant seed powder, can also be taken. Drink extra water as you increase your daily fiber intake. Fluid needs vary, but 9 to 12 cups of fluid a day are recommended for most healthy people. Remember to talk with your doctor before starting supplementation.

Fiber-Rich Foods

To help increase your dietary fiber intake, focus on adding 1 to 3 grams of soluble fiber. Check out the table below for examples of fiber- fiber foods:

	Total Fiber (grams)	Soluble Fiber (grams)
½ cup cooked lentils	8	1
½ cup lima beans	7	3
½ cup baked beans	6	3
½ cup kidney beans	6	3
½ cup oatmeal, regular, before cooking	4	2
½ cup raisin bran	4	1
1 slice whole wheat bread	2	Trace
1 large pear	5	3
1 medium apple	4	1
1 medium orange	4	1
1 medium banana	3	1
½ cup cooked Brussels sprouts	3	2
½ cup cooked carrots	3	1
½ cup cooked winter squash	3	2
1 medium baked potato with skin	3	1
½ cup cooked broccoli	1	1

Would you like to work with a Registered Dietitian?

To schedule an appointment, please obtain a referral for

Medical Nutrition Therapy and contact:

412-692-4497 (Oakland) OR 412-623-2421 (Shadyside)