

Fill Up with Fiber

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Could you be one of the millions of Americans who's missing out on the important health benefits of a widely available, yet under-consumed nutrient? If you're like most, then your **fiber** intake is far less than what many health experts consider to be optimal-which is in the range of 25-35g per day. Fortunately, with a few simple dietary changes you too can reap the benefits of high fiber diet.

Not only is adequate fiber intake important for a healthy digestive system, it is also a crucial component of a successful weight management program. Fiber helps fill you up without adding extra calories. In a study conducted at Bastyr University, researchers found that women who consumed more than the average fiber intake of 14 g/day were less likely to be overweight.

A high fiber diet is also beneficial for improving glucose control in those with diabetes and in lowering "bad" LDL cholesterol. It may even help reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and colon cancer.

Dietary fiber is the indigestible part of plant-based foods. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes all provide fiber. There are two main types found in these foods: soluble and insoluble. All fiber-containing foods contain some of each fiber with certain foods containing more of one type.

Soluble fiber dissolves in water and is found in flaxseed, oats, beans, peas, apples, carrots, citrus fruits, and psyllium. In addition to its role in digestive health, this type of fiber is credited with helping lower cholesterol and improving blood sugar control.

Insoluble fiber is responsible for moving bulk through the digestive tract. Whole grains, bran, nuts, seeds, fruit skins, and many vegetables are good sources of insoluble fiber.

Some foods are good sources of both soluble and insoluble fiber; including flaxseeds, whole grain oats, and barley. Choosing a wide variety of fibrous foods every day will help ensure you get a good mix of both soluble and insoluble fiber.

Prebiotics are a special type of fiber that help feed the "friendly" bacteria in our GI tracts, otherwise known as probiotics. Inulin and Fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS) are two prebiotics. They can be found in artichokes, asparagus, bananas, and onions. Some yogurts now include inulin, which also helps increase calcium absorption. Yogurt is a good source of probiotic bacteria. Several studies suggest that these bacteria help boost digestive health and immunity and may help reduce the risk of some cancers.

High Fiber Foods:

All plant-based foods will provide some fiber, but the following examples are considered to be high-fiber sources. They will help you easily reach the 25-35 grams of fiber you need every day.

<u>Food</u>	<u>Fiber Content</u>
1 cup lentils	16 grams
1 cup black beans	15 grams
1 cup chickpeas	12 grams
½ cup ready to eat bran cereal	10 grams
1 cup raspberries	8 grams
1 oz flaxseed	8 grams
1 cup whole wheat spaghetti	6 grams
1 cup brown rice	4 grams
1 med baked potato with skin	4 grams
1 med sweet corn	4 grams
1 large apple with skin	4 grams
1 cup raw broccoli	3 grams
1 oz almonds	3 grams

Tips to Increase Fiber Intake:

- Start slowly by adding one extra serving of a high fiber food every few days while also increasing fluid intake.
- Start the day with high fiber cereal (more than 5 grams of fiber/serving).
- Carry convenient high fiber snacks like dried fruit, nuts, baby carrots, or high fiber granola or protein bars.
- Sprinkle ground flaxseed or wheat bran on foods like cereal or yogurt.
- Aim for 5-9 servings of fruits and veggies every day.
- Have bean dishes regularly (baked beans, hummus, lentil soups, etc.)
- Always choose whole grains (whole wheat pasta, brown rice, whole oats, etc..).
- Mix in frozen veggies to pasta sauces, soups and casseroles.
- Have fruit for dessert.

Fiber Supplements are available in pills and powders for those who cannot meet their needs with diet alone. A few common ingredients include psyllium husk, guar gum, and hemicellulose.

Don't take fiber supplements with medication or vitamin supplements because they might interfere with absorption. Also drink plenty of water, at least 6-8 glasses a day to prevent constipation.

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Fiber Facts: Soluble Fiber & Heart Disease

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