

FACTS ABOUT FIBER

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is fiber?

Fiber is the part of plants that our bodies can't digest or absorb. It is not found in foods that come from animals. Fiber is found in fruits, vegetables, beans, peas, nuts, seeds and whole grains. High fiber foods contain combinations of two kinds of dietary fibers: insoluble and soluble. Insoluble fiber is the roughage found in fruits, whole grains and vegetables; soluble fiber forms a gel in the gut which slows digestion. Soluble fiber is found in fruit, some vegetables, oats, beans, and barley.

What are the health benefits of a high fiber diet?

- Fiber keeps you regular. Insoluble fiber adds indigestible bulk and acts like a brush to clean out the colon. It helps move waste through your gut. This helps prevent constipation, hemorrhoids and other digestive problems.
- Fiber lowers the risk of certain cancers and heart disease. Populations that eat higher levels of fiber have lower rates of certain cancers than Americans. However, it is not entirely clear that the fiber content is the reason, since high fiber diets differ from low fiber diets in other ways. High fiber diets are associated with lower intakes of meat and processed foods and higher levels of vitamins and minerals.
- Soluble fiber can lower blood cholesterol by binding it in your intestine where it will be eliminated with wastes.
- Fiber fills you up, which helps prevent overeating. High-fiber foods fill you up more than low-fiber foods, so you don't get that empty, hungry feeling soon after eating. Also, high-fiber foods tend to be lower-calorie foods unless lots of fats and sugars are added.
- Fiber promotes healthy digestion. Fiber, especially soluble fiber, slows down digestion. It slows down the absorption of sugar, which gives you a more sustained release of energy, instead of a quick movement into the blood stream.
- Fiber helps diabetics control blood sugar. Fiber helps maintain a normal blood glucose which means that diabetics may need less blood-sugar lowering medications. Studies show that people who eat high-fiber diets reduce their risk of getting Type 2 diabetes. Also, a high fiber diet can delay the progression from pre-diabetes into diabetes.



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Will fiber help me maintain a healthy weight?

High-fiber foods are more filling than low-fiber foods, and in this way act to naturally suppress appetite. Whole fruits with their natural fiber are significantly more satiating than fruit juice with most of its fiber removed. Studies show that eating fiber at a given meal prevents overeating by decreasing food intake at the next meal.

Should I take a daily fiber supplement?

It depends. Fiber supplements can't give you the other benefits that high-fiber foods can, such as satiety or nutrients. However, some people find it difficult to eat enough high-fiber foods to get the desired effect. Fiber supplements do make stool soft, which can ease constipation. Allow your body to adjust to more fiber by gradually increasing fiber. Be sure to drink more water or other fluids to get the full effect and avoid other problems.

Is the amount of fiber the same in fresh, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables?

Yes. Heating, canning and freezing foods does not alter the amount of fiber. However, the removal of skin, seeds or pulp does remove some fiber.

How can I be sure that I am buying a whole grain product?

Don't be misled. Even if a product says "made from whole grains", this does not mean that all three parts of the grain were used in the product. Also, the color of the product is not an indicator of whole grain. Many brown breads have color added from other ingredients such as molasses, brown sugar or caramel coloring to make them look like whole wheat. To be sure you are getting a whole grain product, always read the ingredients label.

Why are some products that list a whole grain first (on the ingredient list) not also high in fiber (i.e., Trix cereal)?

This is because whole grain and fiber are not the same. A serving of whole grain is not always a source of fiber. Whole grain can come from any type of grain: wheat, oats, corn, rice, barley, etc. Depending on the portion of bran, germ, and endosperm naturally occurring in the grain kernel, the fiber content will vary.