

Fibre for Feeling Fantastic

We hear all the time about fibre – but do you really know what it is, how to get it, and why it is so important? Fibre is nature's way of keeping our bodies clean and healthy. Fibre is the indigestible part of plants, like the skins of fruit and coverings of grains, which we do not absorb, but cleans out our digestive tract and gives bulk to our feces. There are two main types of fibre. Soluble fibre acts like a sponge, soaking up toxins for excretion, and slowing down the rate of glucose digestion and absorption into the bloodstream. Insoluble acts like a broom, soaking up water to add bulk and softness to stool and keeping everything moving along comfortably.

Benefits of a high fibre diet

- *fibre curbs overeating* – it stays in your stomach longer, absorbing water and swelling, therefore helps you feel full on less food
- *fibre steadies your blood sugar level* – it mixes with glucose from food and allows a steady absorption of sugars, decreasing the spikes and crashes that can result from a refined meal
- *fibre slows fat absorption* – this causes the energy from fat to be absorbed even slower and more of the fat consumed is not absorbed, but excreted with the fibre
- *fibre reduces cholesterol* – it picks up cholesterol in the colon and removes it via feces
- *fibre promotes regularity* – it stimulates more frequent, softer stools
- *fibre reduces cancer risks in three ways* –
 - by increasing peristalsis (the smooth muscle movement of the colon) and decreasing the amount of contact time a toxin has with the colon wall
 - by binding to carcinogens (cancer-causing substances) for removal via the feces
 - by increasing the good bacteria that lives in our gut that act like our 2nd immune system, fighting bad bacteria so our body doesn't have to

Easy ways to Boost your Daily Fibre

- Consume whole fruits and vegetables instead of juice. The peel on apples and the white pith on oranges are rich sources of fibre, as are potato skins, so serve these with the skin in tact. When you do choose juice, choose nectar or pulp varieties that contain some fibre.
- Cut back on refined foods. "Enriched flour" means the fibre parts have been removed.
- Try a daily smoothie made in the blender with a couple of handfuls of fresh fruits, such as strawberries, bananas, papaya, blueberries, and pears. Add a tablespoon of freshly ground flax seeds for added fibre.
- Snack on dried fruits like apricots, figs, prunes, cranberries, and raisins, mixed with nuts and seeds for steady glucose release.
- Use whole grains instead of white. White bread and white rice have had the fibre processed out of them (causing them to be constipating). Instead use whole grains: bread made with whole grain flour, whole grain cereals that contain wheat bran or oat bran, and whole grain or brown rice pasta. Use brown or wild rice varieties instead of white.
- Incorporate beans into your family's diet. Nearly all varieties of beans are a rich source of fibre, especially kidney beans which can be served in salads, soups, burritos, and chili.
- Instead of a ranch-type dip for veggie sticks try hummus, made from fibre-rich chick peas.
- Choose a high-fibre cereal. Read labels to find ones that contains at least 4 grams of fibre per serving. Eat whole grains like oatmeal or quinoa for breakfast. Add ground flax seeds to your bowl for an easy way to increase the fibre count.
- Choose your lettuce wisely. Iceberg lettuce is useless as a source of fibre or any other nutrient. Spinach and romaine lettuce are healthier choices.
- Fresh fruits have more fibre than canned fruits because much of the fibre is in the peel, which is usually removed in processing.

Sources of Dietary Fibre

Fibre is easy to increase in your diet just by increasing the amount of plant foods in your diet. There is no fibre in animal products; it is only found in plants.

Food	Serving Size	Grams
<i>Vegetables, Raw</i>		
Bean sprouts	½ cup	1.5
Celery, diced	½ cup	1.1
Cucumber	½ cup	0.4
Lettuce	1 cup	0.9
Mushrooms	½ cup	1.5
Peppers, green	½ cup	0.5
Spinach	1 cup	1.2
Tomato	1 medium	1.5
<i>Vegetables, cooked</i>		
Asparagus, cut	1 cup	2.0
Beans, green	1 cup	3.2
Broccoli	1 cup	4.4
Brussel sprouts	1 cup	4.6
Cabbage, red	1 cup	2.8
Carrots	1 cup	4.6
Cauliflower	1 cup	2.2
Corn	½ cup	2.9
Kale	1 cup	2.8
Parsnip	1 cup	5.4
Potato (with skin)	1 medium	2.5
Potato (without skin)	1 medium	1.4
Spinach	1 cup	4.2
Sweet potato	1 medium	3.4
Zucchini	1 cup	3.6
<i>Legumes, cooked</i>		
Baked beans	½ cup	8.8
Chick peas	½ cup	7.0
Dried peas	½ cup	4.7
Kidney beans	½ cup	7.3
Lima beans	½ cup	4.5
Lentils	½ cup	3.7
Navy beans	½ cup	6.0

Food	Serving Size	Grams
<i>Fruits</i>		
Apple (with skin)	1 medium	3.5
Banana	1 medium	2.4
Cantaloupe	¼ melon	1.0
Cherries	10 cherries	1.2
Grapefruit	½ medium	1.6
Orange	1 medium	2.6
Peach (with skin)	1 medium	1.9
Pear (with skin)	½ large	3.1
Prunes	3	3.0
Raisins	¼ cup	3.1
Raspberries	½ cup	3.1
Strawberries	1 cup	3.0
<i>Rice, Breads, Pastas, and Flours</i>		
Bran muffins	1 muffin	2.5
Bread, white	1 slice	0.4
Bread, whole wheat	1 slice	1.4
Crisp bread, rye	2 crackers	2.0
Rice, brown, cooked	½ cup	1.0
Rice, white, cooked	½ cup	0.2
Pasta, reg. cooked	½ cup	1.1
Pasta, whole wheat cooked	½ cup	3.9
<i>Breakfast Cereals</i>		
Cornflakes	1 ¼ cup	0.3
Grape-nuts	¼ cup	1.4
Multigrain	2/3 cup	4.0
Oatmeal	½ cup	4.5
Raisin Bran	2/3 cup	4.0
Shredded Wheat	2/3 cup	2.6
<i>Nuts and Seeds</i>		
Almonds	10 nuts	1.1
Ground Flax Seed	¼ cup	8.0
Peanuts	10 nuts	1.4
Peanut butter	2 tbsps	2.0
Sesame butter	2 tbsps	2.0
Sunflower seeds	1 cup	2.0

How much fibre?

How much fiber is required for good bowel and overall health? Children over the age of 2 should aim for their age in years plus 5; a 6 year old should eat 11 grams of fibre daily. Adults should eat a minimum of 35 grams for disease prevention; up to 50 grams for therapeutic purposes.

Increase the amount of fibre in your diet gradually. This will allow your intestines to adjust to its new fibre regime. A large increase all at once may cause bloating and gas. Eating from a variety of sources will give you a good balance of soluble and insoluble fibre. Make sure you are drinking lots of liquids during the course of the day, including 8-10 8oz glasses of water. Fibre without ample liquid to move it along can lead to constipation.

Make a conscious effort to increase the fibre in your diet. A focus on eating a predominately plant-based diet will allow this to be an easy transition. Instead of the focus of your meal being meat, focus on vegetables and grains and top with meat or beans for protein. Not only will this benefit your digestion, it will benefit your overall health and wellbeing!

References: Sears, W. & M. Sears. The Family Nutrition Book. Little, Brown and Company, NY; 1999
Murray, M. & J. Pizzorno. Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine, 2nd Ed. Three Rivers Press, NY; 1998