



Children's Hospital Boston

Preventative Cardiology

Facts About Fiber

What is fiber?

Fiber is the portion of plant material that humans are not able to digest. There are two kinds of dietary fiber, soluble and insoluble. Both are important for proper bowel function.

Soluble fiber

Soluble fiber dissolves in water, forming a gel in the intestines.

Sources: oatmeal, barley, kidney beans, some fruits and vegetables

Insoluble fiber

Insoluble fiber passes through the digestive system almost intact, adding bulk to the stool and acting as a sponge to absorb water.

Sources: wheat bran, whole grains, many vegetables and skins of fruit

Note: Fiber is not found in any animal products, such as meat, cheese or eggs.

Why should I eat fiber?

- ◆ For **cardiovascular health**: Soluble fiber can help lower serum cholesterol levels by inhibiting the absorption of cholesterol.
- ◆ For improved **control of diabetes** and blood sugars: Fiber helps to regulate or slow glucose absorption.
- ◆ For **preventing constipation and diverticulitis**: Insoluble fiber adds bulk to stool, keeping stool soft and the bowels moving regularly.
- ◆ For **weight loss**: Both types of fiber make you feel full, without adding a lot of calories. Fiber-rich foods tend to be low in fat too.
- ◆ For **cancer prevention**: Fiber-rich foods contain phytochemicals, known to reduce cancer risks. Fiber may also help detoxify cancer-causing substances.
- ◆ For **overall health**: Foods with fiber have lots of vitamins and minerals that our bodies need. Fiber also helps our bowels to function properly on a regular basis, and to prevent either diarrhea or constipation.

How much fiber should I have each day?

20-35 grams/day is recommended. Some people can tolerate even more. If you don't eat a lot of fiber now, increase fiber by small amounts (a few grams) each day. This will help to decrease uncomfortable symptoms of bloating, gas and diarrhea. Make sure to drink plenty of water as well, to prevent constipation.

What foods are high in fiber?

4 or more grams fiber/serving

- All-Bran (1/2 cup) – 9.7g
- Prunes, stewed (1/2 cup) – 8g
- Lentils (1/2 cup) – 7.8g
- Flaxseed, ground (2 Tbsp) – 7g
- Artichoke (1 medium) – 6.5g
- Chick peas, cooked (1/2 cup) – 6.2g
- Figs, dried (1/4 cup) – 6g
- Kidney beans, cooked – 5.6g
- Bran flakes (3/4 cup) – 4.6g
- Green peas, cooked (1/2 cup) – 4.4g
- Spinach, raw (1 cup) – 4.3g
- Pear – 4g

2 - 4 grams fiber/serving

- Soybeans, cooked (1/2 cup) – 3.8g
- Carrots, raw (1 cup) - 3.8g
- Wheat germ (1/4 cup) – 3.8g
- Apple – 3.7g
- Popcorn (3 cups) – 3.6g
- Potatoes, baked with skin – 3.4g
(without skin - 2.5g)
- Almonds (1 oz) – 3.3g
- Strawberries (1 cup) – 3.3g
- Prunes, dried (1/4 cup) – 3g
- Orange – 3g
- Corn, cooked (1/2 cup) – 3g
- Broccoli, raw (1 cup) – 2.6g
- Broccoli cooked (1/2 cup) - 2.2g

How do I add fiber to my diet?

For breakfast:

- Eat a high fiber cereal, like All-Bran, Bran Flakes, or Shredded Wheat.
- Add some raisins to your cereal or oatmeal.

For lunch:

- Use 100% whole wheat bread with sandwiches.
- Add kidney beans and chickpeas to your salads.

For dinner:

- Eat a baked potato with the skin.
- Add spinach, corn, lima beans or Brussels sprouts to your plate.

For snacks:

- Choose raw fruits instead of fruit juice.
- Eat a bowl of popcorn, air-popped or popped in canola oil.