

Fiber

What Is Fiber?

Dietary fiber is the part of plant material in our diet that is resistant to digestion by the human gastrointestinal tract.

There are two types of fiber—soluble and insoluble. Examples of foods rich in soluble fiber are oat bran, fruits, vegetables, brown rice, barley, and nuts. Examples of whole grain foods rich in insoluble fiber are wheat bran and whole-grain breads and cereals.



Why Eat Fiber?

Eating fiber has many benefits. Eating soluble fiber has been shown to reduce the risk of developing heart disease by reducing cholesterol levels.

Eating insoluble fiber has been shown to reduce the risk of developing constipation, colitis, colon cancer, and even hemorrhoids. Diabetics on high-fiber diets need much less insulin. Because fiber fills you up without adding calories, it can help prevent and treat obesity. Vegetables, fruits, nuts, and whole grains also have high amounts of vitamins and minerals necessary for healthy body functioning.

An additional benefit of eating foods rich in fiber is that they taste good.

How Much Fiber?

There is no RDA for fiber, but the American Dietetic Association recommends eating 20-35 grams of dietary fiber from a variety of food sources every day. Most people in the United States average only 5 to 10 grams.

Where Can I Get Fiber?

Here is a list of fiber-rich foods and how many grams of fiber they contain per serving:

	Grams
• All Bran	12
• Peanuts	8
• Raisin Bran or Grape Nuts	7
• Peas/lima beans	7-8
• whole wheat pasta	4
• 1 medium apple	4
• whole wheat bagel	3
• 1 medium banana	3
• whole wheat bread	1.5

Be sure to read the food labels. Choose foods that name one of the following whole grain ingredients first on the food label ingredient list: brown rice, bulgar, oatmeal, whole oats, whole rye, whole wheat, cracked wheat, or whole grain corn.

Increasing Fiber Intake

Here are several easy ways to increase dietary fiber:

- Use fresh or dried fruits as desserts and snacks.
- Leave fiber-rich skins on fruits and vegetables when possible. Raw veggies and fruits have more useful fiber.
- Substitute whole grain products for refined products in your diet.

Remember . . .

- Accompany your increase in fiber with an increase in water.
- Increase fiber gradually.
- Eat foods high in fiber, not fiber-containing supplements.
- Eat a variety of fiber-rich foods.
- Too much fiber (50+ grams per day) may be unhealthy.

Adapted from: Colon Cancer Prevention. American Cancer Society Personal Health, Perspectives & Lifestyles, 2nd ed.

