

Fiber Basics

Why is fiber important?

In the stomach and small intestine, fiber causes a sense of fullness, traps cholesterol and fats and slows absorption of sugars. This helps to regulate weight, lower cholesterol and improve blood glucose levels.

In the large intestine or colon, fiber causes fermentation and promotes growth of healthy bacteria. This in turn enhances the immune system to fight infection and chronic disease. Fiber also absorbs water, adding “bulk” to stool. This promotes regularity and aids with elimination, minimizing constipation.

Overall fiber helps protect against certain diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

What is fiber?

- Dietary fiber is a general term, referring to certain complex carbohydrates that unlike protein and fat, your body cannot digest or absorb.
- There are two types of fiber
 - Insoluble fiber – “Nature’s broom”
 - Fibers that hold on to water, moving waste through the intestinal tract without being broken down
 - Help promote regularity and help prevent constipation
 - Help reduce time that potentially harmful substances in waste come in contact with the intestinal lining
 - Soluble fiber
 - Fibers that dissolve and become gummy or viscous. They bind to fatty substances and promote their excretion as waste.
 - Help reduce cholesterol levels and regulate the body’s use of sugars.

How much fiber should I eat each day?

- General rule for children ages 3-18
 - Add ‘5’ to their age
 - Example: Child is 7 years old + 5 = 12 grams of fiber a day
- Adults require 25-35 grams per day

What are some tips when focusing on fiber?

- It is **VERY IMPORTANT** to drink adequate fluids
- Increase the amount of fiber in diet slowly
- Understanding label lingo
 - High fiber: 5 grams or more per serving
 - Good source: 2.5-4.9 grams per serving
 - More or added fiber: At least 2.5 grams more per serving (compared with standard serving size of traditional food)
- Refined or processed grains such as white breads, pastas, and non-whole grain cereals are lower in fiber. Look for products with “whole grain” or “whole wheat” as the first ingredient.
- Choose whole fruits over fruit juices
- Include fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack
- Beans and legumes are a great source of fiber. Try including these at meals at least 1-2 times per week
- Leave the skin on the potato (and eat it!) for more fiber
- Start the day off with a high fiber breakfast that includes whole grain cereal or oatmeal with a side of fruit.

Fiber content of common foods

Food	Serving size	Total fiber amount (grams)
Fruit		
Apple or Banana	1 medium	3
Blueberries	1 cup	4
Cantaloupe	1 cup	1
Grapefruit or Orange	1 medium	3
Pear (with peel)	1 medium	4
Pineapple	1 cup	2
Prunes (dried)	½ cup	6
Raspberries	1 cup	8
Vegetables and beans		
Asparagus (5 medium, cooked)	½ cup	2
Kidney beans (cooked)	½ cup	6
Pinto beans	½ cup	8
Broccoli or cauliflower (cooked)	½ cup	2
Carrots	½ cup	2
Sweet potato, w. skin (baked)	1 medium	3
White potato, w. skin (baked)	1 medium	5
Spinach, frozen, cooked, drain	½ cup	3
Tomato	1 medium	1
Breads, cereal, grains etc.		
White bread	1 slice	1
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	2
Old-fashioned oatmeal (cooked)	1 cup	4
Wheat germ, toasted	2 Tbsp	3
Brown rice, cooked	½ cup	2
White rice, cooked	½ cup	0.3
Spaghetti, cooked	1 cup	2
Peanuts, dry-roasted	½ cup	6