

Increasing Your Fiber Intake

What is fiber?

Fiber includes the parts of plant foods that cannot be digested. There are two kinds of fiber, both of which are key to a healthy diet and a healthy digestive system:

- **Soluble fiber** aids in bulking and moving food through the gut. It forms a gel when mixed with liquid.
- **Insoluble fiber** does not mix with liquids and passes through the GI tract mostly intact. It is sometimes called “roughage.”

Why do I need to eat it?

Fiber has many important roles, and both types are important for our health.

Soluble fiber helps with...	Insoluble fiber helps with...
Regular bowel movements	Regular bowel movements
Managing diarrhea and constipation	Managing constipation
Lower risk of colorectal cancer	Lower risk of colorectal cancer
Lowering LDL or “bad” cholesterol	Preventing hemorrhoids
Providing a feeling of fullness, which helps with satisfaction after meals and maintaining a healthy weight	Preventing diverticulitis <i>(small, inflamed pouches in the walls of the colon)</i>
Helping keep blood sugar levels stable	

How much do I need?

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends:

- For women, 25 grams per day for adults ages 50 and under, 21 grams per day over age 50.
- For men, 38 grams per day for adults ages 50 and under, 30 grams per day over age 50.

What foods are the best sources?

All plant foods contain fiber, and most have a mix of soluble and insoluble fibers.

The best sources of soluble fiber are:

- most fruits
- certain grains like oats and barley
- legumes, including beans, peas, lentils, and chickpeas
- most root vegetables like beets and sweet potatoes and certain vegetables like broccoli and carrots

The best sources of insoluble fiber are:

- whole grains, like whole wheat bread and corn
- high-fiber cereals like bran
- nuts and seeds
- fruits and vegetables with edible skins and peels like apples, kiwi, tomatoes, green beans, zucchini, and potatoes

What about fiber supplements?

If you need to add more fiber than what you can eat from whole foods, consider:

- **Type of Fiber:** The major brands of fiber supplements (Metamucil®, Konsyl®, Citrucel®, Benefiber®, Fibercon®) all use soluble fiber and work in the same way. Some people respond better to different ones, so you may need to try a few to find the right fit for you.
- **Flavorings and Mixing:** Fiber supplements are available in a variety of forms and flavors, including powders, tablets, and gummies. Powders can be flavored to mix with plain water or unflavored/“clear” to be mixed into other beverages or foods. Tablets and gummies should be taken with plenty of water per box directions.

Interactions with medications and other considerations: A fiber supplement can interfere with the absorption of some medications. As with any supplement, talk to your physician and/or Registered Dietitian before starting a fiber supplement. Sugar-free fiber supplements with sugar alcohols (sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, maltitol, isomalt) can worsen symptoms of certain GI conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Good Sources of Dietary Fiber

*Tip: Increasing the fiber in your diet **gradually** may help minimize bloating and discomfort. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids as you increase your fiber intake.*

Fruits	Serving size	Total fiber (grams)
Raspberries	1 cup	9.8
Pear, with skin*	1 medium	5.6
Apple, with skin*	1 medium	4.2
Orange	1 medium	3.4
Strawberries, sliced	1 cup	3.3
Banana	1 medium	3.1
Grains, cereal and pasta	Serving size	Total fiber (grams)
Spaghetti, whole-wheat, cooked*	1 cup	7.0
Barley, pearled, cooked*	1 cup	6.0
Bran flakes*	3/4 cup	5.5
Oatmeal, quick, regular or instant, cooked	1 cup	4.0
Popcorn, air-popped	3 cups	3.5
Brown rice, cooked	1 cup	3.1
Bread, whole-wheat*	1 regular slice	2.2
Corn tortilla	1 medium (6")	1.8
Legumes, nuts and seeds	Serving size	Total fiber (grams)
Split peas, cooked*	1 cup	16.3
Lentils, cooked*	1 cup	15.6
Black beans, cooked*	1 cup	15.0
Baked beans, vegetarian, canned*	1 cup	10.4
Sunflower seed kernels	1/4 cup	4.0
Chia seeds	1 tablespoon	3.5
Almonds	1 ounce (23 nuts)	3.5
Pistachio nuts	1 ounce (49 nuts)	3.0
Vegetables	Serving size	Total fiber (grams)
Peas, cooked	1 cup	8.8
Jicama, raw, peeled*	1 cup	6.4
Collard greens, fresh, cooked	1 cup	5.6
Broccoli, boiled*	1 cup	5.1
Brussels sprouts, cooked*	1 cup	4.1
Potato, with skin, baked	1 medium	3.8
Tomato sauce, canned	1 cup	3.7
Sweet corn, cooked	1 cup	3.6
Cabbage, boiled*	1 cup	2.8

* more likely to cause gas, so add in slowly

Sample Menu for a High Fiber Diet		
Breakfast	1 cup Raisin Bran with milk, banana, slice of whole wheat toast and jam	11 grams
Snack	½ cup trail mix with nuts	5.5 grams
Lunch	2 corn tortillas (6") topped with ¼ cup refried beans, lettuce, cheese, and salsa	6.5 grams
Snack	1 medium apple	4 grams
Dinner	Chicken with ¾ cup brown rice and ½ cup broccoli	5 grams
		Total fiber = 32 grams