

SEASON

Facts About Fiber

What is Fiber?

Dietary fiber is a type of carbohydrate found in plants, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, and seeds. Although our bodies cannot digest or absorb fiber, it plays an important role in overall health. There are two types of fiber in the foods that we eat: soluble and insoluble. Both types of fiber have been linked to heart health as well as additional health benefits. It is important to note that most fiber-rich foods contain both soluble and insoluble fiber, but are usually higher in one type than the other.

Soluble fiber is found in oats, beans, lentils, nuts, barley, and fruits such as apples, berries, pears, and citrus fruits. It dissolves in liquids, forming a gel-like material. This type of fiber moves slowly through your digestive system, which helps to keep you feeling full. Soluble fiber can help control blood sugar and lower cholesterol levels.

Insoluble fiber is found in whole grains, wheat cereals, and vegetables such as tomatoes, celery, and carrots. This type of fiber helps food pass through your digestive system more quickly. It also adds bulk to stools and can help prevent constipation.

*Note that many high fiber foods contain both soluble and insoluble fiber.

Benefits of Fiber?

A well-balanced eating plan contains a mix of both soluble and insoluble fiber. Incorporating a variety of fiber-rich foods into your eating plan can:

- Promote regular bowel movements
- Support digestive health
- Help control blood sugar levels
- Lower cholesterol levels
- Keep you feeling full
- Help you to achieve and maintain a healthy weight

How much Fiber do I need?

The USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend the following:

Women under 50: 25 to 28 grams per day

Men under 50: 31 to 34 grams per day

Women 51 and older: 22 grams per day

Men 51 and older: 28 grams per day

*Please note that recommendations vary. Speak with your registered dietitian to determine how much fiber is right for you.

Tips for boosting Fiber in your diet

- Aim to make at least half of your grain servings whole grains.
- Make a sandwich on 100% whole wheat bread. Add a vegetable, such as spinach, for an extra fiber boost.
- Try whole-wheat, lentil, or chickpea pasta paired with your favorite pasta sauce. Or, try mixing half and half with white pasta to ease the transition.
- Choose breads, crackers, cereals, and tortillas that list a whole grain as the first ingredient.
- Add fiber to your diet slowly and drink plenty of water to help with digestion. If you add fiber too fast and do not drink enough water, you may have gas pains or feel bloated.
- Swap fruit juices for whole fruits as juice does not contain fiber.
- Add nuts, seeds, or berries to plain yogurt.
- Try whole-wheat crackers, low-fat popcorn, or fruits and vegetables as high-fiber snacks.
- At breakfast, choose a cereal with at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.