

Ways to Boost Fiber

Fiber is an essential nutrient. However, most Americans are falling far short of the recommended daily amount in their diets. Women should aim for 25 grams of fiber per day, while men should target 38 grams (or 21 and 30 grams daily, respectively, for those over the age of 51).

Dietary fiber contributes to our health and wellness in a number of ways. First, it aids in providing fullness after meals, which helps promote a healthy weight. Second, adequate fiber can help to lower cholesterol. Third, it helps prevent constipation and diverticulosis; and, fourth, adequate fiber from food helps keep blood sugar within a healthy range.

Natural Sources of Fiber

Eating the skin or peel of fruits and vegetables provides a greater dose of fiber, which is found naturally in these sources. Fiber is also found in beans and lentils, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Typically, the more refined or processed a food becomes, the lower its fiber content. For example, one medium apple with the peel contains 4.4 grams of fiber, while ½ cup of applesauce contains 1.4 grams, and 4 ounces of apple juice contains none at all.

With a few simple and tasty substitutions, you can increase your fiber from foods in no time. For breakfast, choose steel cut oats with nuts and berries instead of a plain low-fiber, refined cereal. At lunch, have a sandwich or wrap on a whole-grain tortilla or whole-grain bread and add veggies, such as lettuce and tomato, or serve with veggie soup. For a snack, have fresh veggies or whole-grain crackers with hummus. With dinner, try brown rice or whole-grain noodles instead of white rice or pasta made with white flour.

Here are a few whole foods that are naturally high in fiber:

- 1 large pear with skin (7 grams)
- 1 cup fresh raspberries (8 grams)
- ½ medium avocado (5 grams)
- 1 ounce almonds (3.5 grams)
- ½ cup cooked black beans (7.5 grams)
- 3 cups air-popped popcorn (3.6 grams)
- 1 cup cooked pearled barley (6 grams)

When increasing fiber, be sure to do it gradually and with plenty of fluids. Fiber in your diet is similar to a new sponge; it needs water to plump up. If you consume more than your usual intake of fiber but not enough fluid, you may experience nausea or constipation.

Before you reach for the fiber supplements, consider this: fiber is found naturally in nutritious, whole foods. Studies have found the same benefits, such as a feeling of fullness may not result from fiber supplements or from fiber-enriched foods. If you're missing out on your daily amount of fiber, you may be trailing in other essential nutrients as well. Your fiber intake is a good gauge for overall diet quality. Try to reach your fiber goal with whole foods so you get all the other benefits they provide.

Resource: Article by Holly Larson, MS, RD via www.eatright.org