
Eating a High-Fiber Diet

Fiber is what gives strength and form to plants. Most grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits contain fiber. Foods rich in fiber are often low in calories and fat. Because they are starchy, they will fill you up more quickly than foods with low fiber and empty calories. Eating enough fiber daily is a powerful way to cut your risks for some health problems. To find out how much fiber in a serving of canned, packaged, or frozen foods, read the Nutrition Facts label. And aim for a steady supply of fiber each day.

Types of fiber and their benefits

Insoluble and soluble are 2 types of fiber. They both aid digestion and help maintain a healthy weight.

- **Insoluble fiber.** This is found in whole grains, cereals, certain fruits and vegetables, such as apple skin, corn, and carrots. Insoluble fiber helps prevent constipation. It also reduces the risk for some cancers. It's called insoluble because it doesn't dissolve in water.
- **Soluble fiber.** This type of fiber is in oats, beans, and certain fruits and vegetables, such as strawberries and peas. Soluble fiber supports healthy cholesterol levels. This helps lower the risk for heart disease. Eating enough soluble fiber is also a good way to control blood sugar levels.

Look for high-fiber foods

Try these foods to add fiber to your diet:

- **Whole-grain breads and cereals.** Aim for 6 to 8 ounces a day. Include whole grains, such as whole-wheat and oat bran cereals, oatmeal, whole-wheat muffins or toast, and corn tortillas in your meals.
- **Fruits.** Aim for 2 cups a day. Apples, oranges, strawberries, pears, and bananas are good sources. (Note: Fruit juice is low in fiber.)
- **Vegetables.** Aim for at least 2.5 cups a day. This might include asparagus, carrots, broccoli, peas, cabbage, beets, cucumbers, radishes, onions, squash, leafy greens (cooked and raw), Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower to your meals on a regular basis.
- **Beans.** One cup of cooked lentils gives you over 15 grams of fiber. Try navy beans, black beans, lentils, pinto beans and chickpeas.
- **Nuts and seeds.** A small handful of seeds gives you about 3 grams of fiber. Try flax seeds, sunflower, sesame, pumpkin or chia seeds. Nuts are also a great source of fiber. These include almonds, walnuts, pistachios, macadamia, and Brazil nuts.

Keep track of your fiber

Keep track of how much fiber you eat. Read food labels. Then aim to eat a large variety of foods high in fiber every day. Start with breakfast. Ask your healthcare provider how much water you should drink as you start to eat more fiber. Water will keep your digestive system working smoothly.

The daily recommended value for fiber intake is 25 grams a day. Some experts advise that women under 50 eat 25 to 28 grams per day. Men under 50 eat 30 to 38 grams per day. Your daily fiber needs drop to 22 grams for women and 28 grams for men after age 50.

Before you reach for the fiber supplements, think about this. Fiber is found naturally in healthy whole foods. It gives you that feeling of fullness after you eat. Taking fiber supplements or eating fiber-enriched foods will not give you this full feeling. Nor will it give you all the nutrients you need. Or vitamins and minerals that come from eating a whole food diet high in fiber.

Your fiber intake is a good measure of the quality of your overall diet. You may be lacking other important nutrients as well if you are missing out on your daily amount of fiber.