

Healthy Eating: Benefits of Fiber

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Where You Can Find Fiber

Fiber is found only in plant foods - fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, and legumes - certain types of beans and peas.

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There are two main types of fiber: soluble - dissolves in water, and insoluble - doesn't dissolve in water:

- **Insoluble fiber** helps move waste through your intestines. It helps give you regular bowel movements. It can be found mostly in dark leafy vegetables, fruit skins and root vegetable skins, and in seeds and nuts.
- **Soluble fiber** helps you feel full longer. It lets sugar release and get into your system more slowly. This type of fiber can help lower your cholesterol levels. Of course, lower cholesterol reduces your risk for heart disease. It also helps regulate your blood sugar levels, important to people with diabetes. You can find soluble fiber in many grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables.

Fiber Helps Your Health

There are many benefits to a fiber-rich diet:

- **Lowering your cholesterol:** Soluble fiber can lower cholesterol by reducing the amount of fat going into your intestines. Lower cholesterol can help decrease your risk of heart attack and stroke.

- **Weight management:** Fiber helps keep off unwanted pounds by making you feel full. Feeling full helps keep you from overeating and gaining weight.
- **Intestinal health:** Fiber plays a key role in intestinal health. It helps "firm up" your solid waste matter and helps healthy bacteria grow in your gut.
- **Blood sugar control:** Diets high in fiber help control blood sugar levels. This type of diet can also decrease the risk of getting type 2 diabetes.
- **Reduced cancer risk:** High-fiber diets can also reduce your risk of cancer, especially colon and breast cancer.

High-Fiber Foods

It's easy to get fiber into your diet every day. Here are a few foods that can help give you a fiber boost:

- **Beans and other legumes** are high in protein. They are almost fat free, and loaded with fiber. Other great sources of fiber include oats, apples, and flaxseeds.
- **Vegetables** are a very good source of fiber as well. They're also low in calories and contain health promoting phytochemicals - naturally occurring chemical compounds such as beta-carotene.
- **Whole grain cereals, breads, pasta, and crackers** are always better for you than similar items that have been "refined," like white bread and white rice. Whole grains are healthy for you because they contain a lot of fiber.
- **Citrus fruits** are very high in soluble fiber. These fruits can help slow the release of sugar into the blood stream.
- **Dried fruit**, especially dried plums, are super high in fiber. Dried fruit is also packed with powerful disease-fighting nutrients.

Tips to Increase Your Fiber Intake

There are many healthy ways you can get fiber into your daily diet without giving up some of your favorite foods. When shopping for grain items such as pasta or bread, be sure to look for products made from 100% whole grain flour.

Here are a few tips to bring some more fiber into your diet every day:

Breakfast

- Try oatmeal with chopped apples, leave the skin on, and cinnamon
- Have all-bran cereal with fruit and nuts

Lunch/Dinner

- Throw some garbanzo beans on your salad
- Make a bean burrito or try a lentil or bean soup
- Add leftover cooked vegetables to beans and brown rice
- Substitute whole wheat pasta in your favorite recipe
- Try orange or grapefruit slices in salad

Snacks

- Add some ground flaxseeds to yogurt, cottage cheese, or a smoothie
- Mix citrus fruit with cottage cheese or enjoy alone as a snack
- Eat a few dried plums
- Add dried cranberries or cherries to yogurt
- Make your own trail mix using whole grain cereal, dried fruit, and nuts

About the Author

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Lauren Bethell is a nutritionist for Sensei and regular contributor and editor for Sensei Talks. She takes a no-nonsense approach to nutrition and wellness. As a fitness enthusiast and former dieter, she knows from experience if you want to see results, you have to do the work – this goes for all areas of your life. Lauren believes positive thinking, prevention, education and setting realistic goals are the keys to creating a happy, healthy body. She earned her BS in Dietetics from Michigan State University.