



Patient Information

The Health Benefits Of Fiber

When you eat foods that are good for you, the healthy nutrients are usually absorbed by your body and help you to function properly.

But fiber is different — it's not absorbed by the body. Fiber passes through your digestive system without being digested. Fiber is an important part of good digestive health and can protect against serious diseases.

Experts recommend that adults consume 20 grams to 35 grams of fiber per day. After children reach their second birthday, they should consume an amount of fiber equal to or greater than their age, plus 5 grams per day. That means that a 3-year-old should consume 8 grams of fiber each day.

Which Foods Contain Fiber?

Fiber can be found in all plants that are eaten for food, such as fruits, vegetables and grain. There are two kinds of fiber: soluble fiber and insoluble.

Soluble fiber partially dissolves in water to form a gel-like material. This type of fiber can be found in foods such as oats, nuts, beans, apples, pears and strawberries.

Insoluble fiber, which does not dissolve in water, increases movement of material through your digestive system. Foods that contain insoluble fiber include whole grains, wheat bran, seeds, cucumbers, zucchini, celery and tomatoes.

What Are the Health Effects of Fiber?

Fiber is probably best known for its ability to prevent or relieve constipation. But fiber also provides many other health benefits.

A diet high in fiber may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Research has shown that people who increase their whole grain and cereal fiber intake have a lowered risk for type 2 diabetes. This may be due to the fiber itself, as well as the micronutrients in fiber.

A high-fiber diet may lower your risk of disorders such as hemorrhoids, irritable bowel syndrome and diverticular disease (the development of small pouches in your colon).

Fiber may lower blood cholesterol levels and slow the absorption

of sugar. In addition, a high intake of fiber has been linked to a lower risk of heart disease.

Finally, adding fiber to your diet may help with weight loss. In general, foods high in fiber require more chewing time. This gives your body time to register when you're no longer hungry, and you are less likely to overeat. Also, eating a high-fiber diet may cause you to stay full for a longer amount of time than usual, because a meal high in fiber may feel larger in your stomach.

Research has shown that eating a high-fiber diet as part of an overall healthy lifestyle may play a role in maintaining a healthy body mass index (BMI). Other research has shown that women with low-fiber, high-fat diets are more likely to be overweight than women who follow high-fiber, low-fat diets.

How Do I Add Fiber to My Diet?

There are many ways to add fiber to your diet if you are not eating enough now. Here are some ideas:

- Choose breakfast cereals with bran or fiber, or add a few tablespoons of wheat bran to cereal.
- Eat more whole grains and whole grain products.
- Eat fruit at every meal.
- Snack on raw vegetables or low-fat popcorn.
- Eat beans a few times a week.

There are two important tips to remember when adding fiber to your diet. First, start slowly. Although adding fiber to your diet is good for your health, adding too much fiber too quickly may cause bloating, cramping and gas. Increase fiber gradually to your diet over a few weeks. Start by adding one type of fiber to your diet, then wait a few days or even a week until you add another one.

Also, be sure to drink fluids when you increase the amount of fiber in your diet. Fiber works best when it is absorbed with water. If you're not drinking enough water when you consume fiber, you could become constipated. Drink six glasses of water per day. If you're not drinking enough, add at least two more glasses of water per day to your diet when you increase fiber intake.

Additional Notes:
