

Facts about Fiber¹

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What is fiber and why do we need it?



Fiber is a substance found only in plant foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes. Although most types of fiber are chemically similar to carbohydrates, we cannot digest the fiber we eat. But, fiber can help us maintain good health in a number of ways.

- Some types of fiber help slow down the body's absorption of glucose. This can help control blood glucose levels.
- Some types of fiber help to reduce blood cholesterol. This can reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Other types of fiber help keep our bowel function regular.
- High-fiber foods also make us feel full longer after eating. This may help with weight control.



Different types of foods have different types of fiber. It's important to eat a wide variety of plant foods to get a variety of fibers.

What happens if we don't get enough fiber?

Fiber helps us form soft, regular stools. Without enough fiber, we may suffer from constipation, hemorrhoids, or diverticulosis.

How much fiber do we need?

Recommendations for fiber intake are based on studies of the amounts needed to reduce heart disease risk. This level of fiber intake also will help prevent constipation and diverticulosis.

The following table lists recommended daily intakes of fiber.

Life Stage	Amount (g/day)
Men, ages 19-50	38
Men, ages 51+	30
Women, ages 19-50	25
Women, ages 51+	21
Pregnancy	28
Breastfeeding	29

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How can we get enough fiber?



Fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains give us fiber. Fruits and vegetables with edible skins or seeds are full of fiber. Most juices have almost no fiber, so choose whole fruits and vegetables often. Read food labels to find good fiber sources!

Make at least half of your daily grain servings whole grains. Look for products that list a whole grain like whole wheat, brown rice, or whole rye first on the ingredient list.

When increasing fiber in the diet, it's important also to increase fluids. It's also a good idea to start slowly and gradually add high-fiber foods. Here are some high-fiber foods and the amount of fiber they contain.



Food	Fiber (grams)
Lentils, cooked, 1 cup	16
Peanuts, boiled, 1 cup shelled	16
Black beans, cooked, 1 cup	15
Figs, dried, ½ cup	7
Wheat bran flakes cereal, 1 cup	7
Prunes, dried or canned, ½ cup	6
Orange, raw, 1 large	4
Popcorn, air-popped, 3 cups	4
Potato, baked, with skin, 1 medium	4
Barley, pearled, cooked, ½ cup	3
Oatmeal, cooked, ½ cup	2
Whole wheat bread, 1 slice	2

What about fiber supplements?

It's best to get fiber from food, not supplements. Not only are foods more enjoyable to eat, but they also are packed with other things needed for good health, like vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Fiber supplements don't have these added benefits. Supplements also can be costly. If you think you need a supplement, first talk to your healthcare provider.

How much is too much?

It is difficult to get too much fiber just by eating a variety of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. It may be possible to get too much if fiber supplements or food with added fiber are eaten regularly. The main problems caused by too much fiber are constipation, gas pain, and bloating. Excess fiber intake also may reduce absorption of the minerals iron, zinc, and calcium.

Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and classes for you to attend. Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information to you.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://fyics.ifas.ufl.edu>
<http://www.nutrition.gov>
<http://www.eatright.org>
<http://mypyramid.gov>

