
Facts on Dietary Fiber

What is dietary fiber?

Fiber is a substance found only in plants such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nut, seeds and legume. Fibers provide structure in stems, leaves, roots, skins, and trunks of plants, and therefore they are found in all plant-derived foods. They are part of the plant food that your body cannot fully digest.

Dietary fiber can be classified into 2 main groups: water soluble and water insoluble. Most plant foods have some or both types of fiber.

1. Water soluble fiber: This group of fiber dissolves in water forming a gel that slows down the digestion of food, makes stool softer to prevent constipation, and helps lower blood cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Good Sources of water soluble fiber include: Oatmeal, oat bran, barley, beans, and some vegetables and fruits are sources of water soluble fiber.

2. Water insoluble fiber: This group of fiber does not dissolve in water, but it is able to hold water making stool more bulky which helps to prevent constipation.

Good Sources of water insoluble fiber include: Whole wheat and wheat bran, whole grains, nuts, legumes, and some fruits and vegetables are sources of water insoluble fiber.

Other Good Sources of Fiber

Most vegetables and fruits such as raspberries, prunes, and pears with their skin are good sources of fiber. Grain products such as whole grains, wheat and oat bran, and oatmeal are good sources of fiber. Meat alternatives such as peas, legumes, and nuts are also good sources of fiber. However meat, fish, poultry, cheese, and milk products have little to no fiber.

- **Very high source** of fiber has at least 6 grams of fiber per serving
- **High source** of fiber has at least 4 grams of fiber per serving
- **Source** of fiber has at least 2 grams of fiber per serving
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Why is dietary fiber important in the diet?

Dietary fiber plays **MANY** beneficial roles in the body. Fiber can help:

- Keep the digestive system healthy and prevent constipation
- Lower fats in your blood, including total and LDL cholesterol, by reducing fat and cholesterol absorption

- Maintain a healthy weight by making you feel full, so you eat less
- Control blood glucose if you have diabetes by slowing down the digestion of foods that turn into sugar in the body
- Lower the risk of colon cancer, digestive problems, and heart disease

How much fiber do I need?

Most Canadians only consume about half of the fiber that they need each day.

Females: 19-50 years of age need about 25 grams of fiber each day; >50 years of age need about 21 grams of fiber each day.

Males: 19-50 years of age need about 38 grams of fiber each day; >50 years of age need about 30 grams of fiber each day.

Tips to Help Increase the Fiber in Your Diet

- Choose more whole grain bread, cereal, pastas and brown rice
- Try adding some wheat germ or oat bran into your cereal, yogurt, applesauce, and baking
- Eat more whole fruits and vegetables and include the skins and membranes where possible
- Include legumes (cooked beans, peas, and lentils) in your diet on a regular basis. These can be eaten alone or added to salads, casseroles, or soups
- Snack on some nuts such as almonds and peanuts
- Incorporate dietary fiber supplements regularly like Metamucil and Prodiem into breakfast shakes, on top of cereal, or in yogurt (ensure to follow the instructions on the label).

Note: When increasing the fiber in your diet, increase it slowly as this will help avoid intestinal discomfort as your body adjusts to the change. Ensuring that your fluid intake is adequate is important, as fiber needs fluid to keep stools soft. Try drinking at least 6-8 cups of fluid each day, selecting water as your number 1 choice. Enjoy regular meals and snacks and be active!