

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. They are part of the plant food that your body cannot fully digest.

Dietary fiber can be classified into two main groups: **water soluble and water insoluble**. Most plant foods have some of 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, triglycerides, and blood sugar levels.

Good Sources of water soluble fiber include: All Bran Buds TM, oatmeal, oat bran, barley, beans, psyllium husk, and some vegetables and fruits.

2. **Water insoluble fiber:** This group of fiber does not dissolve in water, but it is able to hold water making stool bulkier 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.

Sources of Fiber

Good Sources of Fibre	Poor Sources of Fibre
raspberries, blueberries, prunes, pears and apples with the skin, whole grains, wheat, oat bran, oatmeal, legumes, seeds and nuts	meat, fish, poultry, cheese, milk, yogurt, milk alternatives, and oils

- **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

How much fiber do I need?

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.

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 by keeping bowel movements regular, preventing constipation and adding bulk to stool for ease of passage through lower gut.
- 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 longer, 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, diverticulosis, hemorrhoids, and heart disease

Tips to Help Increase the Fiber in Your Diet

- Choose more whole grain bread, cereal, pastas and brown rice
- Try adding some wheat germ, ground flaxseed, chia seeds, oat bran into your cereal, yogurt, applesauce, and baking
- Have oatmeal for breakfast made from steel cut oats
- 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 adequate fluid intake is important because fiber needs fluid to keep stools soft. Try drinking at least 6-8 cups of fluid each day, selecting water as your number one choice. Enjoy regular meals and snacks and be active!