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Fiber Factor

What is dietary fiber?

Dietary fiber comes from the structural part of plants and cannot be digested by human enzymes. There are many types of dietary fibers, but they are all grouped into one of two categories: soluble or insoluble.

Insoluble fiber increases the bulk of waste material by attracting water. Good sources of insoluble fiber include whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. Since insoluble fiber attracts and holds water, stools produced by a high-fiber diet tend to be bulkier and softer and pass more quickly through the intestine.

Soluble fiber dissolves in water and forms a gel. Good sources of soluble fiber include legumes, many fruits and vegetables, and various brans, such as oat, barley, and rice. Because of its gel-like nature, soluble fiber can bind sugars, fats, bile acids, and steroids, increasing fecal excretion of these elements. Consequently this binding property slows or reduces absorption of sugar and fats into the blood, which helps improve blood sugar control and lower blood cholesterol.¹

Why do we need fiber?

A fiber-rich diet can help lower blood cholesterol levels, promote healthy intestinal microflora, and help prevent constipation, hemorrhoids, diverticulosis, and irritable bowel syndrome. It also can help prevent diabetes and improve blood sugar control. Dietary fiber may also play a role in weight management.²

Possible temporary effects of increasing fiber to your diet

Bloating | Constipation | Diarrhea | Gas

Minimize side effects by increasing fiber slowly over days, which allows the digestive system to adjust. Be sure to include plenty of filtered water in the diet.

How much fiber do we really need?

Americans consume on average less than 14 grams of dietary fiber per day. The current recommended intake levels are as follows:

- 38 grams for men and 25 g for women up to age 50
- 30 grams for men and 21 grams for women over age 50³

References:

1. Dhingra D et al. *J Food Sci Technol.* 2012;49(3):255-266.
2. Kaczmarczyk M et al. *Metabolism.* 2012;61(8):1058-1066.
3. Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Dietary Reference Intakes for Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat, Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein, and Amino Acids.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Ways to increase fiber intake

- Select whole fresh or frozen fruits over juice or canned fruits
- Eat the peel on apples, pears, peaches, and sweet potatoes
- Choose 100% whole grain or sprouted grain, unrefined breads, crackers, pasta, and cereals
- Look for whole wheat, whole oat, or whole rye on the ingredient list
- Use organic whole wheat flour instead of white flour
- Substitute brown rice for white rice when possible
- Lightly steam vegetables; avoid overcooking
- Substitute beans or legumes for a portion of the meat in recipes
- Add beans or legumes to soups and salads
- Try bean dips and spreads like hummus (garbanzo beans and sesame paste)
- Add oat bran or ground flaxseed to cereal, casseroles, and ground meat
- Try new or different whole grains in place of pasta or potatoes



Pasta, Rice, & Grains, cooked

Food	Serving Size	Calories	Dietary Fiber (g)	Insoluble Fiber	Soluble Fiber
Quinoa	½ C	75	4.7	4.0	0.7
Barley	½ C	98	4.3	3.3	1.0
Bulgur	½ C	78	4.0	3.3	0.7
Buckwheat Groats	½ C	78	2.7	2.3	0.4
Wild rice	½ C	72	2.0	1.1	0.9
Oatmeal	½ C	72	2.0	1.1	0.9

Vegetables

Food	Serving Size	Calories	Dietary Fiber (g)
Sweet potato	½ C	132	3.8
Winter squash	½ C	47	3.4
Brussels sprouts, cooked	½ C	30	3.2
Jicama, raw	½ C	25	3.2
Spinach, fresh, cooked	½ C	21	2.7
Carrots, cooked	½ C	35	2.6
Broccoli, cooked	½ C	22	2.3
Green beans, fresh, cooked	½ C	22	1.9
Beets	½ C	37	1.7
Carrots, raw	½ C	24	1.6
Onions, cooked	½ C	46	1.5
Red peppers, raw	½ C	20	1.5
Onions, raw	½ C	30	1.4
Asparagus, cooked	½ C	22	1.4
Kale, cooked	½ C	18	1.3

Nuts & Seeds

Food	Serving Size	Calories	Dietary Fiber (g)	Insoluble Fiber
Flax seeds	4 Tbsp. 3 Tbsp. (ground)	140	6.3	2.9
Almonds	24	170	3.2	2.9
Pistachios	47	162	3.1	2.3
Sunflower seeds	3 Tbsp.	163	3.0	2.4
Pine nuts	3 Tbsp.	160	3.0	2.7
Pecans	10	196	2.2	1.7
Hazelnuts	27	188	1.7	1.0
Brazil nuts	8	186	1.5	1.2
Walnuts	7	178	1.4	1.0

Legumes

Food	Serving Size	Calories	Dietary Fiber (g)	Insoluble Fiber	Soluble Fiber
Split peas	½ C	115	8.1	7.0	1.1
Lentils	½ C	115	7.8	7.2	0.6
Pinto beans	½ C	117	7.4	5.5	1.9
Garbanzo beans	½ C	134	6.2	4.9	1.3
Navy beans	½ C	129	5.8	3.6	2.2
Green peas	½ C	67	4.4	3.1	1.3
Soybeans, edamame	½ C	127	3.8	2.1	1.7

Fruit

Food	Serving Size	Calories	Dietary Fiber (g)	Insoluble Fiber	Soluble Fiber
Figs, dried	½ C	254	12.1	8.2	4.0
Plums, dried	½ C	203	6.0	2.8	3.2
Apricots, dried	½ C	208	5.9	3.0	2.9
Raspberries	½ C	30	4.2	3.8	0.4
Pear	1 med.	98	4.0	1.8	2.2
Blackberries	½ C	37	3.8	3.1	0.6
Apple, fresh w/ skin	1 med.	82	3.7	2.8	1.0
Peach	1 med.	42	2.0	1.2	0.8
Cherries	½ C	52	1.7	1.2	0.5
Strawberries	½ C	18	1.7	1.2	0.5
Watermelon	1 slice	92	1.4	0.9	0.5
Plum, fresh	½ C	45	1.2	0.6	0.7
Pineapple	½ C	38	0.9	0.8	0.1
Grapes	½ C	57	0.8	0.5	0.3



References:

- Spiller GA. 2001. *The CRC Handbook of Dietary Fiber in Human Nutrition*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida.

