



Fiber Facts: Why fiber is important

Why is fiber important?

Including fiber in your diet is good for your health in lots of ways. A diet rich in fiber can:

- Reduce the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes
- Lower the risk of several forms of cancer
- Improve cholesterol and blood pressure
- Help regulate your digestion
- Help you feel fuller, so you may eat less

What exactly is fiber?

Fiber is the part of plant foods that our bodies can't digest or absorb. It is found in fruits, vegetables, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Fiber is also known as roughage or bulk.

There are two kinds of dietary fiber: insoluble and soluble. We benefit from both.

Soluble fiber comes from fruit, some vegetables, oats, beans, peas, lentils, barley, and psyllium seed (*Metamucil*). When mixed with liquid, it forms a gel, which helps control blood sugar and reduces cholesterol.

Insoluble fiber comes from fruits, grains, and vegetables. It adds bulk and acts like a brush to clean out the colon. It helps food pass through the digestive tract more quickly and prevents constipation.

What is a whole grain?

A **whole grain** has all three of its original parts: the bran (fiber-rich outer layer), the endosperm (middle layer), and the germ (inner layer). Whole grains are rich in nutrients, including fiber. Whole wheat, oatmeal, rye, cornmeal, bulgur, barley, brown rice, and even popcorn are all whole grains.

A **refined grain** has been milled, so only the middle layer (endosperm) is left. Milling removes much of the vitamins. "Enriched" flour has had some of the nutrients added back, but not the fiber.

How much fiber do I need?

The American Heart Association recommends between 25 and 38 grams of fiber a day in a well-balanced diet. Since most people only consume about half the recommended amount of fiber, try these suggestions to increase the fiber in your diet.

Adding more fiber to your diet

1. Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
2. Try more recipes with beans, peas, barley, lentils, quinoa, bulgur, or brown rice.
3. Eat oatmeal, bran, or another whole grain cereal for breakfast.
4. Choose breads, cereals, tortillas, and crackers that list a whole grain as the first ingredient on the label.
5. Make at least half of your grain servings whole grains.
6. Add fiber to your diet slowly, over 2-3 weeks. If you add it too fast, you may feel bloated or have gas pains.
7. Unless your doctor has told you not to, drink 6 to 8 cups of water and other fluids a day to keep things moving smoothly through your intestines.
8. If you eat wheat bran to keep your bowels moving, start with 1 teaspoon per meal. Increase slowly to 2 to 4 tablespoons a day. If you use psyllium fiber supplements such as metamucil,

be sure to follow the directions and drink enough fluids to remain hydrated.

9. Buy unprocessed foods when you can. Food processing often removes fiber.

Read food labels

Look for the "dietary fiber" content on food labels. Good sources of fiber have at least 10% of the "percent daily value" for fiber. To find whole grain foods, look for the words whole wheat or whole grain in the ingredient list. "Multigrain", "wheat" and "enriched flour" do not mean whole grain.

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 cup (50g)		
Servings Per Container About 13		
Amount Per Serving	Wheat Cereal	with 1/2 cup skim milk
Calories	180	220
Calories from Fat	10	10
% Daily Value**		
Total Fat 1g*	2%	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%	0%
Trans Fat 0g		
Polyunsaturated Fat 0g		
Monounsaturated Fat 0g		
Cholesterol 0mg	0%	1%
Sodium 420mg	18%	20%
Potassium 100mg	2%	11%
Total Carbohydrate 40g	13%	15%
Dietary Fiber 5g	22%	22%
Soluble Fiber 1g		
Sugars 5g		
Other Carbohydrate 30g		
Protein 5g		

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE GRAIN WHEAT, SUGAR, SALT, CALCIUM CARBONATE, BARLEY MALT EXTRACT, TRISODIUM PHOSPHATE. FRESHNESS PRESERVED BY BHT.
VITAMINS AND MINERALS: IRON AND ZINC (MINERAL NUTRIENTS), VITAMIN C (SODIUM ASCORBATE), A, B VITAMIN (NIACINAMIDE), VITAMIN B₁ (THIAMIN MONONITRATE), VITAMIN B₆ (PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE), VITAMIN A (PALMITATE), VITAMIN B₂ (RIBOFLAVIN), A, B VITAMIN (FOLIC ACID), VITAMIN B₁₂, VITAMIN D.
CONTAINS WHEAT INGREDIENTS.

FIBER CONTENT OF FOODS * High in soluble fiber

Vegetables	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)	Fruits	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)
Artichoke hearts, cooked	1/2 cup	5g	Apple, with peel	1 medium	3g
* Asparagus, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	* Apricots	1 medium	1g
* Avocado	1/2 cup	6g	Asian Pear	1 medium	4g
Baked potato w/ skin	1 medium	4g	Banana	1 medium	3g
Beets	1/2 cup	2g	Cantaloupe	1/2 cup	1g
Broccoli, cooked	1/2 cup	3g	Cherries	10 medium	1g
* Brussel Sprouts	1/2 cup	3g	Figs, raw	1 medium	1g
Cabbage, cooked	1/2 cup	1g	Honeydew	1/2 cup	2g
Carrots, raw	1 medium	2g	* Mango	1 medium	4g
Cauliflower, cooked	1/2 cup	1g	Nectarine	1 medium	2g
Chinese Mustard Greens	1/2 cup	2g	* Orange	1 medium	3g
Corn, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Papaya	1/2 cup	1g
Eggplant, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Peach, with skin	1 medium	2g
Fennel, raw/sliced	1/2 cup	1g	Pear, with skin	1 medium	5g
Green Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	* Prunes	1/2 cup	6g
Lettuce, Romaine	2 cups	2g	Raisins	1/2 cup	3g
Onions, chopped	1/2 cup	1g	Raspberries	1/2 cup	4g
Peas, cooked	1/2 cup	4g	Strawberries, sliced	1/2 cup	2g
Spinach, cooked	1/2 cup	4g	Cereal	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)
* Sweet potato, cooked	1/2 cup	4g	All Bran (100%) cereal	1/2 cup	9g
Swiss Chard, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Cheerios	1 cup	4g
Tomato, raw	1 medium	2g	Granola	1 cup	3g
Turnips, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Fiber One	1/2 cup	14g
Zucchini, sliced	1/2 cup	<1g	Raisin Bran	1 cup	7g
Beans and Nuts	Serving	Dietary Fiber (g)	Shredded Wheat	1 cup	6g
Almonds	1/4 cup	4g	Wheat bran	2 tbs	3g
* Black Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Wheaties	1 cup	3g
Flaxseed, ground	2 tbs	4g	Grains	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)
* Kidney beans	1/2 cup	8g	* Barley, cooked	1 cup	6g
Lentils, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Brown Rice, cooked	1 cup	4g
* Lima Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	7g	Rice Noodles	1 cup	2g
* Navy Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	10g	Quinoa, cooked	1 cup	5g
* Peanuts	1/4 cup	3g	Rye Bread	1 slice	2g
Pecans, chopped	1/4 cup	3g	Whole wheat bread	1 slice	3g
* Pinto Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Whole wheat english muffin	1 slice	3g
Pistachios	1/4 cup	3g	Whole wheat pasta, cooked	1 cup	4g
* Soy Beans (Edamame)	1/2 cup	5g			

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference.

Additional resources

Connect to our website at kp.org. Here you'll find the Health Encyclopedia and kp.org/nutrition, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics. Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

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