

Increase Dietary Fiber – The Easy Way to Eat to Support a Lifestyle of Service!

In order to support a successful and sustainable lifestyle of service, we need to eat for energy which involves making sure we have a healthy diet.

Sounds easy, right? Not for most of us! According to a 2012 Food & Health Survey (IFIC), 52% of Americans believe that doing their annual income taxes is easier than knowing what they should and should not eat to be healthier. In addition, 76% believe that ever-changing nutritional guidance makes it hard to know what to believe when it comes to healthy eating.

When you are living a lifestyle of service, there is little time to sort out the confusion and invest time in complicated and time-consuming diet plans. One of the most effective, yet uncomplicated ways to make sure you are eating a healthy diet that will support a lifestyle of service is to get the recommended intake of dietary fiber from *whole, unprocessed foods*.

What is dietary fiber?

Dietary fiber is the part of plants (fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes) that your body cannot digest. Fiber falls into two categories- soluble (dissolves in water) and insoluble (does not dissolve in water) - both of which are important.

Why focus on dietary fiber?

By eating more *whole, non-processed foods* that are high in dietary fiber, a few things, by default, will most likely happen in your diet. Eating more fiber increases the likelihood that you will:

- Eat more plant-based foods
- Eat less refined sugar
- Eat less added salt
- Eat less unhealthy fats
- Not overeat, as fiber enhances the feeling of satisfied fullness

In addition, research* shows that when comparing higher vs lower fiber intakes, higher fiber intake is associated with a 15-30% decrease in deaths from all causes as well as specific decreases in:

- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke incidence & mortality
- Type 2 diabetes
- Colorectal cancer
- Body weight
- Systolic blood pressure
- Total cholesterol

*Sources: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30638909>; <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/should-i-be-eating-more-fiber-2019022115927>

Since dietary fiber is from plant foods, does that mean I should become a vegan or vegetarian?

Some people prefer to limit or avoid animal products in their diet and focus primarily on plant-based foods. However, it is not necessary to adopt a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle to enjoy the health benefits that come with getting an adequate amount of dietary fiber.

How much fiber is recommended in order to get the health benefits described?

The USDA makes the following recommendations:

For adults under 50 years of age: Women = 25g/day; Men = 38g/day

For adults over 50 years of age: Women = 21g/day; Men = 30g/day

The typical American currently gets between 10 - 15 g/day of dietary fiber.

Is increasing dietary fiber recommended for everyone?

Eating an adequate amount of dietary fiber is recommended for most healthy adults. However, there are some medical conditions where increasing dietary fiber is contraindicated. For this reason, it is a good idea to check with your physician before making any major changes in dietary fiber intake.

What about fiber supplements or processed foods labeled as being high in fiber? Can't I just take those in place of getting dietary fiber through whole, unprocessed foods?

Processed foods with added fiber often contain refined sugar, salt and unhealthy fats. Fiber supplements and fiber enhanced processed foods generally only have a few types of fiber and are missing important vitamins, minerals and other health enhancing nutrients. *Whole, unprocessed foods* have many types of fiber** that are beneficial to your body as well as an array of important macro and micro-nutrients necessary for good health.

**Types of fiber and health benefits: <https://www.webmd.com/diet/compare-dietary-fibers>

How should I go about increasing dietary fiber?

When increasing dietary fiber, there are four important recommendations to consider in order to make that change successful and sustainable.

1. **Take your time** - Making any change in your diet is best done gradually over time, but this is especially true for increasing dietary fiber. Increasing the amount of fiber you eat too quickly can result in gastrointestinal distress. It is a good idea to eat your regular diet and slowly replace foods with higher fiber alternatives and try out new higher fiber foods.
2. **Drink water** - Fiber and water go together. Fiber absorbs water and needs water to move it through the gastrointestinal tract. To avoid constipation and gastrointestinal distress, it is important to drink adequate water. The standard recommendation of at least 8 cups of water over the course of a day is a good place to start, however everyone has different hydration needs depending on age, activity level and other factors.
3. **Eat a variety of high fiber foods** - High fiber foods are found in many kinds of plant-based foods - vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, peas and whole grains. When increasing dietary fiber, focus on adding *whole, unprocessed foods* from *all these categories* as opposed to just a few.

- Be intentional** - Working your way up to the recommended dietary fiber intake will not come easily if you are accustomed to eating the standard American diet. It will require that you *be intentional* about it. It is best to start one meal at a time, focusing on increasing fiber intake at breakfast, then lunch, and finally dinner.

Where do I start?

Consider starting to add fiber to your diet by incorporating more of the following high fiber foods:

Whole wheat pasta (1 cup)	7g fiber
Barley (1 cup cooked)	6g fiber
Chickpeas (½ cup cooked)	6g fiber
Edamame (½ cup boiled & shelled)	4g fiber
Lentils (½ cup cooked)	8g fiber
Split peas (½ cup boiled)	8g fiber
Blackberries & Raspberries (½ cup)	8g fiber
Pears (1 medium)	6g fiber
Artichokes hearts (½ cup cooked)	7g fiber
Brussels sprouts (1 cup cooked)	5g fiber
Chia seeds (2 Tablespoons)	10g fiber
Hass avocados (½ avocado)	5g fiber

Source: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/11-best-high-fiber-foods/>

More Resources:

More higher fiber foods: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/high-fiber-foods/art-20050948>

To look up fiber amounts in common foods: <https://caloriecontrol.org/healthy-weight-tool-kit/food-calorie-calculator/>

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