

Fiber Focus

Dietary fiber is found primarily in foods that come from plants. This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and beans. There are two types of fiber: **soluble and insoluble**. Both types are good for your health and provide different benefits. Synthetic fiber is a synthetic fiber added to foods (example: inulin).

Insoluble fibers are not changed during digestion. They draw water into your bowel and help to prevent constipation. They also support colon function and health. Good sources of insoluble fiber include:

- Wheat bran
- Vegetables
- Fruits (with skins)
- Legumes (dry beans and peas)
- Whole-grain foods

Soluble fibers soak up water and become gel-like in the stomach and intestine. These fibers reduce the risk of heart disease by blocking the absorption of fats and cholesterol. This slows the absorption of sugars from the intestine and reduces LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and helps better control blood sugars. Foods that are high in soluble fiber (>4 grams per serving) include:

- Oats, oatmeal, oat bran and barley
- High fiber multigrain clusters
- Bran flakes or whole grain oats
- Beans and lentils (i.e. kidney beans)
- Some vegetables
- Some fruits
- Flax seeds, chia seeds
- Almonds, walnuts, and peanuts provide greater than 2 grams of soluble fiber per serving

How much fiber should I have in my diet?

A healthy diet includes 25-35 grams of fiber daily. Currently, most Americans only eat 15 grams of fiber each day. If you include at least 10 grams of soluble fiber per day, it can help lower LDL cholesterol. Here are some ideas to help you to include more **total fiber** and **soluble fiber** into your diet.

Slowly increase fiber. Increase by about 4g per day. Going from 15g per day to 25g per day without a slow increase can result in cramps, bloating, and constipation. Give your body time to adjust to increased fiber.

Choose oatmeal, oat bran or whole grain cereals for breakfast. Some cold cereals are made from oats, but they contain less fiber than oatmeal or oat bran. Read nutrition labels and choose cereals with at least 3-4 grams of fiber per serving. You can also choose high fiber breads and toast (look for “whole” wheat).

Sprinkle ground flax seed on cereal, yogurt or fruit. It has a nutty flavor. Be sure to store the ground flax seed in the fridge and use it up within a couple weeks. You can also buy whole flax seed, that can be safely stored for months. Grind it yourself with a coffee grinder. Grind only small amounts at a time.

Include at least 1 to 2 cups of fresh (or frozen) fruit every day. Choose whole fruits rather than juices because they are higher in fiber. Fresh, frozen, canned (in light syrup, water or 100% juice) or dried fruits will provide soluble fiber. 1 cup of fruit is about the size of a baseball.

Eat more meals with beans. Navy, kidney, pinto, or garbanzo beans and lentils are good

protein substitutes for meat. When you buy canned beans, be sure they are the no added salt version, or drain and rinse beans prior to use.

Include low starch vegetables in your meals and snacks. Aim to eat 2 to 3 cups every day. Try to fill half your plate with vegetables at lunch and dinner. Use fresh or frozen vegetables most of the time. Pick frozen vegetables that **do not** have any sauces or seasonings added. If you use canned vegetables, use the no salt added version.

Choose high quality whole grains. This includes products made from oat, barley, wheat, bran, rye, quinoa, wild or brown rice, millet, or amaranth. Be sure to purchase 100% whole grain or products where “whole” is used in the first ingredient.

Be sure to drink 8-10 (8 ounce) glasses of fluid or more every day. Fiber and water work together. Without enough fluid, high fiber meal plans can be constipating, since fiber absorbs large amounts of water. When you increase fiber in your everyday eating, it is best to do this over several weeks to prevent problems with bloating, gas or diarrhea.

Tips for Reading Food Labels to Increase Fiber in Your Diet

- Look for the word “**whole**” grain (such as oats, barley, wheat, rye, or corn) in the ingredient list as one of the first ingredients or foods labeled with **100% whole grain** on the front of the package.
- Limit foods with “**refined**” or “**enriched**” grains. Refined foods often have less fiber and vitamins/minerals. Enriched foods have nutrients added back into the food that are removed in processing.

Enriched foods do not have all the nutrients added that are removed.

- Choose foods that are “**fortified**” as these have additional vitamins and minerals that the American diets lack.
- Choose foods that have **at least 3 grams** of dietary fiber per serving or more than 5% daily value. These are considered “significant” sources of dietary fiber.
- It is not required for food products to have soluble and insoluble fiber listed on the food label. However, if the packaging claims to have soluble or insoluble fiber then the grams must be listed on the label.
- Ingredients are listed by quantity. Those that are in higher amounts are listed in the beginning of the ingredient list. If you see a whole grain as one of the first 3 ingredients, it means that it is considered a significant source.

High Fiber Fruits (more than 3 grams per serving)

- Apple, large unpeeled*
- Avocado, ½*
- Blackberries, ½ cup*
- Blueberries, ½ cup
- Banana, 8 ¾”*
- Dates, 3 dried*
- Orange, 1 medium*
- Pear, 1 unpeeled*
- Prunes, 5 dried*
- Raspberries, ½ cup
- Raisins, 1.5 oz about 75

Moderate Fiber Fruits (less than 2 grams per serving)

- Apricots, 4 halves canned or dried
- Applesauce cooked, ½ cup
- Cantaloupe, ½ cup
- Cherries sweet, ½ cup

- Fruit cocktail canned, ½ cup
- Grapefruit sections, ½*
- Grapes green or red, ½ cup
- Honeydew melon, ½ cup
- Kiwi, sliced
- Mango, ½ peeled without pit
- Mandarin oranges
- Nectarine, 2 ½ inches
- Olives, 5 green or black
- Peach, peeled
- Pears, peeled 2 halves
- Pineapple, ½ cup
- Strawberries, ½ cup
- Tangerine, 1 medium
- Watermelon, ½ cup

**High Fiber Vegetables
(more than 3 grams per serving)**

- Artichokes, ½ cup
- Brussel sprouts, ½ cup*
- Broccoli, ½ cup*
- Edamame, ½ cup
- Green peas, cooked ½ cup
- Pumpkin, canned ½ cup
- Potato with skin, large
- Parsnip, ½ cup
- Kidney beans, cooked ½ cup*
- Lima bean, cooked ½ cup*
- Mushrooms, canned ½ cup
- Navy, black, soy, beans, cooked ½ cup
- Spinach, cooked ½ cup
- Spinach, raw 2 cups
- Sweet potato, peeled medium
- Squash acorn or butternut, cooked ½ cup

**Moderate Fiber Vegetables
(less than 2 grams per serving)**

- Asparagus, ½ cup
- Bean sprouts, ½ cup
- Beet slices, canned ½ cup
- Celery, ½ cup
- Cucumber, peeled ½ cup
- Cabbage, cooked ½ cup
- Carrot, 1 Large*
- Cauliflower, ½ cup
- Green beans, ½ cup
- Mixed veggies, canned ½ cup
- Mushrooms, fresh ½ cup
- Onions, ½ cup
- Potatoes, peeled ½ cup
- Peppers, ½ cup
- Radish, ½ cup
- Sweet potato, cooked ½ cup
- Spinach, cooked ½ cup
- Tomato, canned ½ cup, fresh 2 ½”
- Zucchini, ½ cup

*Indicates fruits/vegetables that are higher in soluble fiber

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please call UW Health at one of the phone numbers below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at **(608) 287-2770**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2022 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#403