



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 high fiber foods 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 absorb or digest. 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. It is important to eat plenty of both.

Insoluble fiber comes from fruits, grains, and vegetables. It adds bulk and acts like a brush to clean out the colon. As it passes through the digestive tract, insoluble fiber remains mostly intact. This helps keep your bowel movements regular.

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

What is a whole grain?

A **whole grain** has all three of its original parts: the bran (fiber-rich outer layer), the germ (inner layer), and the endosperm (middle layer). Whole grains are rich in nutrients, including fiber. Whole wheat flour, 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, iron, protein, and fiber. "White" and "wheat" flours are refined grains. "Enriched" flour has had some of the nutrients added back, but not the fiber. White rice is also a refined grain.

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. The average American eats only 15 grams of fiber a day.

Adding more fiber to your diet

1. Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Eat the skins and peels whenever you can, because they contain a lot of fiber.
2. Try more recipes with beans, peas, 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. 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.

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.

When looking for whole grain products, read the ingredient list. In the example below for whole wheat cereal, the first ingredient is "whole grain wheat."

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 190mg	6%	11%
Total Carbohydrate 40g	13%	15%
Dietary Fiber 5g	22%	22%
Soluble Fiber 1g		
Sugars 0g		
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 B₁₂ (RIBOFLAVIN), A, B VITAMIN (FOLIC ACID), VITAMIN B₉, VITAMIN D.
CONTAINS WHEAT INGREDIENTS.

FIBER CONTENT OF FOODS

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
Avocado	1/2 cup	6g	Apricots	1 medium	1g
Bamboo Shoots	1/2 cup	1g	Asian Pear	1 medium	4g
Beets	1/2 cup	2g	Banana	1 medium	3g
Broccoli, cooked	1/2 cup	3g	Cantaloupe	1/2 cup	1g
Brussel Sprouts	1/2 cup	3g	Cherries	10 medium	1g
Cabbage, cooked	1/2 cup	1g	Figs, raw	1 medium	1g
Carrots, raw	1 medium	2g	Honeydew	1/2 cup	2g
Cauliflower, cooked	1/2 cup	1g	Mango	1 medium	4g
Chinese Mustard Greens	1/2 cup	2g	Nectarine	1 medium	2g
Eggplant, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Orange	1 medium	3g
Fennel, raw/sliced	1/2 cup	1g	Papaya	1/2 cup	1g
Green Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Peach, with skin	1 medium	2g
Lettuce	1/2 cup	<1g	Pear, with skin	1 medium	5g
Onions, chopped	1/2 cup	1g	Prunes, dried	1/2 cup	6g
Peas, cooked	1/2 cup	4g	Raisins, dried	1/2 cup	3g
Shiitake Mushrooms, cooked	1/2 cup	3g	Raspberries	1/2 cup	4g
Spinach, cooked	1/2 cup	4g	Strawberries, sliced	1/2 cup	2g
Swiss Chard, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Cereal	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)
Tofu (firm)	1/2 cup	1g	All Bran (100%) cereal	1/2 cup	9g
Tomato, raw	1 medium	2g	Cheerios	1 cup	4g
Turnips, cooked	1/2 cup	2g	Granola	1 cup	3g
White Corn, raw	1/2 cup	2g	* Instant Oatmeal	1 cup	4g
Zucchini, sliced	1/2 cup	<1g	Quaker Oatmeal Squares	1 cup	4g
Dry Beans and Nuts	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)	Raisin Bran	1 cup	7g
Almonds	1/4 cup	4g	Shredded Wheat	1 cup	6g
* Black Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Wheaties	1 cup	3g
Lentils, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Bread, Rice, and Pasta	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (g)
* Lima Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	7g	* Barley, cooked	1 cup	6g
* Navy Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	10g	Brown Rice, cooked	1 cup	4g
* Peanuts	1/4 cup	3g	Whole Wheat Tortilla	1 piece	2g
Pecans, chopped	1/4 cup	3g	Macaroni, whole wheat cooked	1 cup	4g
* Pinto Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	8g	Rice Noodles	1 cup	2g
Pistachio	1/4 cup	3g	Rye Bread	1 slice	2g
* Soy Beans (Edamame)	1/2 cup	5g	Wheat Bread	1 slice	3g
* White Beans, cooked	1/2 cup	6g	Wheat English Muffin	1 cup	3g
* High in soluble fiber			Wild Rice, cooked	1 cup	3g

Additional resources

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