

Fiber

What's in it for you

This handout explains the types of fiber found in foods, and why it is important as a part of a healthy diet.

What is fiber?

Fiber is a form of carbohydrate found in plants. It is the part of the plant that our bodies cannot digest.

But, fiber plays an vital role in our health. It helps us digest our food and may help prevent disease.

There are 2 types of fiber, *insoluble* and *soluble*. Each type has a different effect on your body.

Insoluble Fiber

Insoluble fiber is the “woody” type of fiber often called *roughage*. It does not dissolve in water, but it does *absorb* water. This makes the stool travel faster through your intestines, which improves regularity. Also, insoluble fiber may decrease your risk of colon cancer. Good sources of insoluble fiber are whole-wheat products and vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, corn, spinach, and potatoes with their skins.

Soluble Fiber

Soluble fiber dissolves in water and becomes gel-like. This fiber binds to the cholesterol, which makes it less likely to be absorbed. Large amounts (20 grams per day) may lower blood cholesterol. Some research shows that water-soluble fiber may slow the entry of glucose into the blood. Good sources of water-soluble fiber are oats, beans (legumes), fruits, and vegetables such as asparagus, green beans, cabbage, cauliflower, celery and potatoes without their skins.

How much fiber do I need?

Most Americans eat only 10 to 15 grams of fiber a day. But, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) suggests that people with diabetes eat 20 to



An apple with its skin is one example of a high-fiber food.

35 grams of fiber every day. This is the the same amount of fiber that is advised for everyone. The fiber you eat should come from many sources, such as vegetables, beans, grains, and fruits.

Fiber content is not listed on all food labels. And, many foods that are high in fiber are not processed foods, so they do not have labels. The chart below will help you find out how much fiber you are eating.

Food	Average Fiber Grams in 1 Serving
Starches and Bread (½ cup or 1 slice)	
Whole grain breads, cereals, crackers	2
Starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, yams)	3 to 4
Legumes (beans, peas)	3 to 4
Vegetables	
Raw (1 cup)	3
Cooked or canned (½ cup)	2
Fruit	
Fresh (1 cup)	2 to 3
Frozen and canned (½ cup)	2
Dried (¼ cup)	3
Juice (½ cup)	0
Other	
Meat	0
Milk	0
Fat (other than nuts and seeds)	0
Nuts and seeds (2 tablespoons)	1 to 2

Source: *Handbook of Diabetes Nutritional Management*, Powers, M.A., c. 1987

Fiber Tips

Follow these tips to get the right amount of fiber in your diet.

- Eat whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains more often.
- If you are not used to eating high-fiber foods, add them to your diet slowly. A sudden increase in high-fiber foods may cause gas, bloating, or diarrhea.
- Increase your fluid intake as you increase your fiber. This will help reduce gas and bloating.

- For a snack, try a bran muffins or a piece of fruit with its skin, such as an apple. The skins are a good source of fiber.
- Get into the habit of eating salads with meals.
- Do not overcook vegetables or fruits. Too much cooking reduces their fiber content.
- Fruit smoothies and vegetable juices are good for you, but should be consumed in small amounts. The blender action reduces the fiber content.
- As you increase your fiber intake, you may be eating more carbohydrates. Monitor your blood glucose levels and note any changes.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Endocrine and Diabetes Care
Center: 206.598.4882

UW Medicine Neighborhood
Clinics: 206.520.5000