



A Fiber of Truth

Americans consume an average of 15 grams of fiber per day, less than half the recommended amount. Eating more fiber helps to prevent intestinal problems like constipation and diverticular disease. Fiber can also help to lower blood cholesterol and blood sugar as well as aid in weight loss — all of which can reduce your heart disease risk.

What is fiber and why is it so important?

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate found in plants. While most carbohydrate foods, when digested, break down to sugar in the body, fiber is not digested and therefore does not affect blood sugar levels. Fiber tends to make you feel fuller faster on fewer calories which may assist in weight management.

While there are many different kinds of fiber, it is most commonly divided into two categories: soluble and insoluble. Both are important for overall health and can be found together in most fibrous foods.

Soluble fiber

- “Soluble” or “viscous” fiber mixes with water to form a gel, slowing digestion.
- It’s important for heart health as it can help lower LDL (bad) and total cholesterol.
- Sources include: oats, lentils, beans, apples, oranges, pears, berries, celery, carrots, oat bran, barley and psyllium.

Insoluble fiber

- “Insoluble” fiber cannot dissolve or be broken down by digestive enzymes.
- It’s good for the digestive tract because it has a laxative effect and adds bulk, which helps prevent constipation.
- Sources include: whole wheat and whole grain products, wheat bran, corn bran, nuts and seeds, flaxseed, brown rice, quinoa, most vegetables and many fruits.

The link between soluble fiber and heart disease

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Follow-up Study

- Participants who consumed >16 grams of total dietary fiber had an 11% lower risk of heart disease than those who consumed < 8 grams of total fiber.

Cholesterol lowering effects of psyllium

- 10 grams of psyllium per day lowered LDL cholesterol by 5% in 8 weeks when eaten in addition to a low fat/low cholesterol diet

How much is enough?

Aim for 25–35 grams of dietary fiber each day and include adequate fluids (8 cups of water per day) so fiber will move easily through the digestive tract.

Easy ways to boost your fiber intake:

1. Eat more fruits and vegetables.
2. Snack on nuts and popcorn.
3. Choose whole grain breads, pasta, rice and cereals.
4. Add beans and legumes to soups and salads.
5. Try supplements — fiber from food is best, but these can be helpful if necessary.



SOURCES: <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=215976>;
<http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/71/2/472.long#T3>