

Nik's Health Beat



By
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Fiber, an important part of a heart-healthy diet, is not absorbed and passes through the digestive system largely intact. It is an essential part of our digestive process in addition to protecting us against illnesses such as heart disease or cancer. Fiber is found only in plant foods, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds.

What is fiber?

Fiber is a complex carbohydrate that forms the matrix of the fruits, vegetables, and grains (cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignans). There are two types of dietary fiber: soluble fiber that forms a gel when mixed with liquid and insoluble fiber that does not. The insoluble fiber is not digested by your digestive system and passes thorough the intestines unchanged. The soluble fibers are partially digested by the bacteria in the colon.

Why Do You Need Dietary Fiber?

Fiber slows the absorption of fats and carbohydrates in your gastrointestinal tract, thus

reducing the absorption of excess amounts of calories that can turn into body as fat. It provides a sensation of fullness and suppresses your appetite by expanding ten times by its weight and volume in your intestines.

Benefits of high fiber diet

Heart disease: A high dietary fiber intake has been demonstrated to lower the risk of heart disease in a number of large-scale studies following people for many years. A Harvard study of over 40,000 male health professionals revealed that people on high fiber diets had a 40% lower risk of coronary heart disease compared to those on a low fiber diet. A related study of 68,000 women revealed similar results. Cereal fiber from grains seemed to be particularly beneficial. Diets especially high in soluble fiber have been shown to lower the total cholesterol by as much 15 to 20 points.

Colon cancer: Relying on the results from a number of relatively small studies, for many years physicians have been advocating high-fiber diet for lowering colon cancer risk. However, a Harvard study that followed over 80,000 female nurses for 16 years, found that higher dietary fiber intake was not strongly associated with a reduced colon cancer risk or colon polyps (a precursor to colon cancer).

Type II Diabetes: Eating low carbohydrates with low glycemic-index, and adding fiber

to your diet will slow the absorption of carbohydrates and reduce sudden insulin surges. Studies have shown that people who were on a high fiber diet had a fifty percent reduction in the development of Type II diabetes. High glycemic- index foods such as potatoes, white bread, white rice, refined cereals (corn flakes, Cheerios), white spaghetti, and sugar should be used sparingly. Compliment your daily diet with low glycemic-index foods such as whole fruits, oats, bran, beans, and whole-grain cereals.

Diverticular Disease: Fiber has long been used in the prevention of diverticulitis, an inflammation of the colon pouches that is seen with increasing frequency with age. One-third of all Americans over age 45 and in two-thirds of those over age 85 have symptoms of diverticular disease. The Harvard study of male health professionals found that people who were on a diet high in insoluble fiber had a 40% lower risk of diverticular disease.

Constipation: Constipation is one of the most common gastrointestinal complaints, particular in the elderly population in the United States. Fiber increases the bulk and facilitates the intestinal motility thus reducing symptoms of constipation. The wheat and oat bran fiber seems to be more effective in relieving constipation compared to fiber from fruits and vegetables. I recommend that you increase your fiber intake

gradually and drink plenty of water since the fiber absorbs a large amount of water.

While some research shows that a high-fiber diet may reduce the risk of obesity, high fiber diets are not known for their weight loss advantages.

Fiber slows the absorption of calories from fats and carbohydrates. It has been shown that fiber can expand 8 to 10 times its volume by absorbing water. This leads to increased bulk in the stomach, a sensation of fullness, and appetite suppression.

No harmful effects have been noted in people who have consumed Metamucil or Citrucel over a long time. In fact, they are routinely recommended for those with irritable bowel syndrome or diverticulosis. High fiber diet may interfere with vitamin and mineral absorption.

How Much Fiber You Need?

I recommend that you consume 20 to 30 grams of fiber per day. An average American diet provides only 5-7 grams. Hence, it is imperative that you refer to the high-fiber shopping list at the end of this chapter to select a variety of foods that can greatly increase your daily fiber intake. Try to incorporate fiber in your breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Addition of supplemental fiber also can boost your daily fiber intake.

Side Effects

High-fiber diets can produce side effects such as nausea, diarrhea, and abdominal bloating

Source of Dietary Fibers

Start your day with a high-fiber breakfast cereal with five or more grams of fiber per serving. For example, a half a cup serving of bran flake cereal has 5.5 grams and an unpeeled pear has 4.5 grams of fiber. Select cereals with the word *bran* or *fiber* in the name or add a few tablespoons of unprocessed wheat bran to your favorite cereal.

Oats, fruits, vegetables, and legumes are excellent sources of high fiber diet. Switch to whole-grain breads. Look for whole wheat, whole-wheat flour or another whole grain as the first ingredient on the label. Experiment with brown rice, barley, and whole-wheat pasta. Take advantage of today's ready-to-use vegetables. Beans, chick peas, and lentils are good source of fiber.

Fiber is an excellent choice for chronic constipation. However, if you experience acute constipation, consult with your physician. It could be a sign of intestinal blockage that may need immediate medical attention.

I also encouraged to visit www.sugarlandheartcenter.com and learn more about Nikam's diet.

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