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How to Increase the Soluble Fiber in Your Diet

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Introduction

It's standard advice repeated often by nutrition experts: eat plenty of foods containing fiber. Yet fiber continues to be underrepresented in the diet of many consumers. The average American, for example, takes in only about half of the recommended fiber levels. And not surprisingly, most have little idea of how much (or how little) their diets contain.

Fiber Basics

Dietary fiber is the part of fruits, vegetables, and grains that is not digested when eaten. It comes in two basic categories - soluble and insoluble. About three-quarters of the fiber in cereal is the insoluble type, which contributes to what is often referred to as "intestinal regularity." Less well known is the role of soluble fiber. About one-quarter of the total fiber in food is the soluble type. Oats, beans and other legumes, and some fruits and vegetables are all good sources of soluble fiber. So is psyllium, a grain found in some cereals and in certain bulk fiber supplements

Here are some of the benefits of consuming soluble fiber:

- * When eaten on a regular basis as part of a low-fat, low cholesterol diet, soluble fiber can help lower blood cholesterol, particularly if you have elevated cholesterol levels

- * Soluble fiber slows the time it takes for the stomach to empty. This enhances your weight loss efforts by helping you feel full for a longer period of time

- * Diets high in soluble fiber may help control blood sugar levels in people with diabetes

- * Foods that are good sources of fiber also tend to be rich in vitamins, minerals, and plant chemicals, such as antioxidants

How Much Is Enough?

The American Dietetic Association recommends that people consume 20 to 35 grams of total fiber per day, of which 5 to 10 grams should be soluble fiber. But Americans typically average only about 12 to 17 grams of total fiber and 3 to 4 grams of soluble fiber a day.

Finding Fiber

- Including a bowl of oatmeal at breakfast will help insure an adequate intake of soluble fiber. So will eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day
- Because 1/2 cup of many legumes contains about 2 grams of soluble fiber, try including beans like pinto or kidney beans in meals a few times a week



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For example:

- Warm up with a cup of split pea or lentil soup after a winter outing
- Heat canned baked beans and serve as a side dish instead of French fries
- Make bean burritos with pinto or black beans, a small amount of sharp cheddar cheese and some salsa wrapped in a tortilla
- Dip fresh vegetables into hummus (a Middle Eastern spread made with chick peas)
- Make a bean salad with a variety of colorful cooked beans, chopped tomato and onion, and fresh parsley

Since soluble fiber can be a healthful, tasty addition to your diet, why not make a New Year's resolution to increase your fiber intake?

Some Selected Sources and Amounts of Soluble Dietary Fiber(American Heart Association, Fiber, Lipids, and Coronary Heart Disease)

Food Amount Soluble Fiber, grams

Legumes (cooked)

- Kidney beans 1/2 cup 2.0
- Pinto beans 1/2 cup 2.0

Vegetables (cooked)

- Brussels sprouts 1/2 cup 2.0
- Broccoli 1/2 cup 1.1
- Spinach 1/2 cup 0.5
- Zucchini 1/2 cup 0.2

Fruits (raw)

- Apple 1 medium 1.2
- Orange 1 medium 1.8
- Grapefruit 1/2 medium 1.1
- Grapes 1 cup 0.3
- Prunes 6 medium 3.0

Grains

- Oatmeal (dry) 1/3 cup 1.3
- Oat bran (dry) 1/3 cup 2.0
- Corn flakes 1 ounce 0.1
- Brown rice (cooked) 1/2 cup 0.4
- Whole-wheat bread 1 slice 0.4
- White bread 1 slice 0.2

Source

- Krause's Food Nutrition, and Diet Therapy LK. Mahan, S. Escott-Stump, Philadelphia : WB Saunders Co, 1996