

fiber



For most people, fiber is something they are told is of great nutritional value and healthy, yet there is little understanding of what it is and what it does.

Dietary fiber, also known as roughage or bulk, includes all parts of plant foods that your body can't digest or absorb. Unlike other food components such as fats, proteins or carbohydrates — which your body breaks down and absorbs — fiber isn't digested by your body. Therefore, it passes virtually unchanged through your stomach and small intestine and into your colon.

Research has shown that increased fiber in the diet can potentially lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, lowers insulin levels, triglycerides and bad cholesterol while increasing levels of HDL (good) cholesterol. It is recommended that we eat 25-30 grams of fiber per day. The average person, however, only gets 14-18 grams of fiber per day.

FIBER CAN BE SEPARATED INTO TWO TYPES

Soluble fibers (fiber that dissolves in water)

Soluble fiber moves slowly through your digestive system and lowers blood cholesterol and glucose levels in the blood.

Foods high in soluble fiber are:

- oatmeal
- nuts and seeds
- beans
- apples
- strawberries

Insoluble fiber (fiber that does not dissolve in water)

Insoluble fiber moves more quickly through your digestive system and aids in digestion and in cleaning out the digestive tract.

Foods high in insoluble fiber (does not dissolve in water) are:

- whole grains
- wheat bran
- carrots
- celery
- zucchini

A HIGH-FIBER DIET HAS MANY BENEFITS, WHICH INCLUDE:

Lowering blood cholesterol levels

Soluble fiber found in beans, oats, flaxseed and oat bran may help lower total blood cholesterol levels by lowering low-density lipoprotein, or "bad," cholesterol levels.

Controlling blood sugar levels

Fiber, particularly soluble fiber, can slow the absorption of sugar, which for people with diabetes, can help improve blood sugar levels. A high-fiber diet may also reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Aiding in weight loss

High-fiber foods generally require more chewing time, which gives your body time to register when you're no longer hungry, so you're less likely to overeat. Also, a high-fiber diet tends to make a meal feel larger and linger longer, so you stay full for a greater amount of time. And high-fiber diets also tend to be less "energy dense," which means they have fewer calories for the same volume of food.

Mayo Clinic 2008

USDA

Epicurean Group 2010