

Fiber is a Good Friend

Grandmother was right; “roughage” is good for you. We should eat the apple skins and eat lots of fruits and vegetables.

Research is proving that fiber is very important for good health. Fiber is the indigestible part of a plant. It is not absorbed into your body. Fiber is found in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, beans and nuts. Fiber keeps your intestines working; it can lower your risk of some types of cancer, help lower cholesterol and help lower blood sugar.

There are two kinds of fiber. These are soluble and insoluble:

Soluble Fiber is the fiber that is inside of foods, such as the flesh of apples and the grain of rice or wheat. In your stomach, soluble fiber binds and dissolves with liquids to form a gel that makes you feel full as it slows digestion, letting your body absorb more nutrients from the rest of your food. Soluble fiber can prevent cholesterol buildup and slow down the absorption of sugar into your blood stream.

Insoluble fiber is the bulk as it absorbs liquid in the stomach; this pushes waste down and out of your system. Insoluble fiber is usually found in the skins and outer parts of foods. It may be more tough or chewy. This build helps clean out your systems and passes foods through your digestive system. Both types of fiber are beneficial to your health.

Most people don't consume enough fiber. The National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine recommends that men consume 30 grams and women 25 grams. After the age of 50, men only need 30 grams and women 21 grams.

Great sources of fiber include:

- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Fruits such as oranges, bananas, apples, berries, prunes and pears.
- Vegetables such as green peas, broccoli, spinach and artichokes
- Legumes such as pinto beans, soy lentils, and butterbeans.
- Almonds, pecan, and walnuts

Good sources of fiber have 3 or more grams of fiber. Excellent sources of fiber have 5 grams or more. Some excellent sources of fiber include: navy beans, lima beans and sweet potatoes.

If you are not used to eating a lot of fiber, increase the amounts gradually. Allow your body a few weeks to get used to more fiber.

Sources: Mayo Clinic, National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine and Utah State Extension.

