

Easy Ways to Boost Fiber Intake

It's Easier Than You Think!

-- By Christine Seymour, Health & Fitness Writer

Fiber is one of the easiest nutrients to incorporate into your diet, and one of the most important. However, many Americans don't get the much needed 25 to 30 grams recommended daily for a healthy diet. Insufficient fiber intake can increase your risk for many health problems, including constipation, high cholesterol, weight gain, irritable bowel syndrome, and even cancer of the colon.

What is Fiber?

Fiber is the fibrous part of a plant food that your body cannot digest. Therefore, when it passes through the digestive system, it acts as a broom, sweeping out all unnecessary waste leftovers from digestible food. Fiber can be found naturally in many foods, and in supplement form. Here are some easy ways to add fiber to your diet:

Replace your white bread with whole wheat bread.

Many breads are packed with fiber—after all, just ½ cup of whole wheat flour packs more than 7 grams. Look for the words "whole wheat" at the top of the ingredients list, but remember to read those nutritional labels carefully. Just because a loaf of bread claims to be "whole grain" or "wheat" doesn't mean it includes a healthy dose of fiber in the package. Many of those eye-catching labels will reveal only 1 gram of dietary fiber, meaning that the bread is made mostly from white flour, not whole wheat. *les* all measure up at about 4 grams of fiber per serving.

Leave the sugary cereals on the shelves.

Whole grain cereals and bran flakes are usually jam-packed with fiber—about 5 grams in one ¾ cup serving! *Fiber One* cereal by General Mills is a great choice, packing 14 grams of fiber in each serving! If you're having a hard time swallowing these healthier varieties, try adding a little sweetness with fresh fruit, vanilla soy milk, a touch of honey, or a sugar-free sweetener.

Pass the beans, please.

Beans and legumes are always a healthy choice, usually containing 6-7 grams of fiber per ½ cup serving (cooked). Plus, you can easily add them to just about any meal. Heated as a side, in soups or chili, added to salads, or in place of meat in a main dish, beans have a healthy combination of fiber, protein, and healthy fat that keeps you feeling fuller longer.

Sweeten with fruit; add volume with vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are notorious "diet" foods, but should be must-eat staples of everyone's diet. These tasty wonders are high in volume, low in calories, and high in fiber—a great combination for any dieter who wants to fill up without breaking his calorie budget.

One cup of fresh red raspberries holds a whopping 8 grams of fiber and blackberries are close behind at about 7.5 grams. Pears, prunes, and apples all measure up at about 4 grams of fiber per serving.

Vegetables are a little lower on the totem pole for fiber, but still a great source. Acorn squash (1/2 cup baked) and artichoke hearts (1/2 cup cooked) provide about 4.5 grams of fiber, and a baked potato (*with the skin*) comes in at just fewer than 4 grams. Get 2 grams of fiber in a serving of broccoli, asparagus, cabbage, carrots, green beans, spinach, lettuce, or tomatoes.

More Fiber-Rich Tips

- Choose fresh fruit and/or vegetables over juice.
- To get more fiber and nutrients, eat the skin of cleaned fruits and vegetables.
- Include bran and whole grain breads daily.
- Drink more water to accommodate your increased fiber intake to reduce indigestion.
- Eat less processed foods and more whole foods.

- Try to meet your fiber requirements with foods rather than supplements.
- A large increase in fiber over a short period of time could result in bloating, diarrhea, gas, and all-around discomfort. It is better to add fiber to your diet gradually over a recommended period of about three weeks, to avoid abdominal problems.

The Top Twenty Fiber Foods

This list can serve as a general guide. For more specific calorie and fiber content of particular foods, to estimate your daily and weekly quotas, refer to the alphabetical chart that follows:

1. Dried beans, peas, and other legumes
This includes baked beans, kidney beans, split peas, dried limas, garbanzos, pinto beans and black beans.
2. Bran cereals
Topping this list are Bran Buds and All-Bran, but 100% Bran, Raisin Bran, Most and Cracklin' Bran are also excellent sources.
3. Fresh or frozen lima beans, both Fordhook and baby limas
4. Fresh or frozen green peas
5. Dried fruit, topped by figs, apricots and dates
6. Raspberries, blackberries and strawberries
7. Sweet corn, whether on the cob or cut off in kernels
8. Whole-wheat and other whole-grain cereal products.
Rye, oats, buckwheat and stone-ground cornmeal are all high in fiber. Bread, pastas, pizzas, pancakes and muffins made with whole-grain flours.
9. Broccoli-very high in fiber!
10. Baked potato with the skin
(The skin when crisp is the best part for fiber.) Mashed and boiled potatoes are good, too-but not french fries, which contain a high percentage of fat.
11. Green snap beans, pole beans, and broad beans
(These are packaged frozen as Italian beans, in Europe they are known as haricot or french beans.)
12. Plums, pears, and apples
The skin is edible, and are all high in pectin.
13. Raisins and prunes
Not as high on the list as other dried fruits (see #5) but very valuable.
14. Greens
Including spinach, beet greens, kale, collards, swiss chard and turnip greens.
15. Nuts
Especially almonds, Brazil nuts, peanuts, and walnuts (Consume these sparingly, because of their high fat content.).
16. Cherries
17. Bananas
18. Carrots
19. Coconut
(dried or fresh-but both are high in fat content).
20. Brussels sprouts

Tips to Stay Full Longer

Beat Hunger and Boost Satisfaction

No doubt about it, hunger is unpleasant. In fact, it can be downright embarrassing when your tummy grumbles for your attention at the most inopportune times. When you're watching your calorie intake to lose or manage your weight, there will be days when you might experience ongoing hunger, even when you're eating at the top of your calorie range. It can be so distracting and debilitating that you're ready to throw in the towel. If deprivation is what eating healthy is all about, then forget it!

Not so fast. Don't give up on your new way of eating until you add what could be the missing ingredient back into your eating and weight loss program. What's the elusive "secret" to feeling fuller, longer? Satiety.

Satiety (sa-TIE-e-tee) is that wonderfully pleasant feeling of fullness you get as you eat, when you're no longer hungry, but aren't overly stuffed or uncomfortable. You are just satisfied beyond desire. The more satisfied you feel after a meal, the less you'll eat later. So how do you increase satiety without eating MORE?

Eat More Low Density Foods

Calorie density refers to the number of calories per gram of food. Foods that are HIGH in calorie density contain a high number of calories per gram; foods that are LOW in calorie density contain a low number of calories per gram. Calorie density is the key to feel full without overeating.

When you eat too many calorie dense foods, you'll end up consuming a lot of calories to fill your belly. If you focus on low calorie density foods, you can fill up on fewer calories because low density foods contain a lot more water, which adds weight and volume to the food, but no calories.

Just drinking a glass of water along with the meal does not provide the same degree of satiety. Research has shown that to reduce hunger and boost fullness, the water has to be in the food. Why? Because there are separate mechanisms in the brain to control hunger and thirst. If the food you eat contains the water, it will stay in the stomach longer while the food is being digested. Beyond that, there is also the psychological component of eating food versus drinking water. When you eat food, even water-rich food, you get more sensory stimulation because you have more food going through your mouth and you're eating for a longer period of time, both of which help you feel more satisfied with your meal.

The following are all water-rich food choices with about 90% bound water. They can have a great impact on the calorie density of your diet.

- **EAT MORE low sodium broth-based soups** like chicken broth and vegetable broth.
- **EAT MORE leafy greens** like lettuce, baby spinach and mixed salad greens with fat-free dressing.
- **EAT MORE fruits** like apples, blueberries, cantaloupe, grapefruit, oranges, peaches, strawberries and watermelon.
- **EAT MORE non-starchy vegetables** like asparagus, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, tomatoes and winter squash.
- **TIP:** Start your meal with a low sodium bowl of broth-based soup or low-calorie leafy green salad to fill up on fewer calories. Turn to non-starchy vegetables when you get the munchies.

Fill Up on Fiber

Fiber contains only 1.5 to 2.5 calories per gram, while other carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram. Fiber-rich foods also necessitate more chewing and slow the passage of food through the digestive tract. The fiber in carbohydrates helps prevent those peaks and valleys in blood sugar levels that can cause cravings and poor food choices. They also may stimulate a satiety hormone in the brain.

- **EAT MORE fiber** from whole grains, fruits and vegetables with skins, beans, lentils and legumes. Aim for 25-35 grams each day to help reduce your calorie intake and increase your satiety level.
- **TIP:** Avoid refined carbohydrates (like white bread, white rice, white pasta and sugar). When eaten alone, refined and simple carbohydrates can wreak havoc on satiety by causing rises and falls in blood sugar which trigger hunger every few hours.

Lean on Protein

Studies suggest that protein appears to help prolong satiety more than carbohydrates or fat can. Meeting your protein needs is important, but eating more protein than your body needs will NOT boost your metabolism.

- **EAT MORE lean protein** from meats, chicken, seafood, low-fat dairy, legumes, lentils and soy products.
- **TIP:** Prepare your meat using low-fat cooking methods like grilling and baking.

Fit in the Fat

Cutting fat intake reduces the calorie density of a food. In other words, you get a bigger portion of food for the same calories when it has fewer fat grams. However, if you go too low in fat you won't enjoy the flavor, texture or satiety of your food. Plus dietary fat is essential for staying healthy.

- **EAT ENOUGH fat** to meet the fat recommendations in your diet. This will bring the pleasure and satisfaction back to your meals so you're less likely to overeat later.
- **TIP:** Eliminate fat where you don't need it, opting for reduced fat foods instead of full fat versions. Select low-fat dairy products, low-fat salad dressings, low-fat mayonnaise, etc. and limit saturated and trans fats.

Go Nuts

Nuts have been shown to have a very positive impact on satiety because of their protein and fiber content. A SMALL handful of these nutritious nuggets will often hold you over until your next meal. Of course, portion control is important because nuts and seeds are high density foods.

- **Choose nuts** like peanuts, almonds, walnuts, cashews and others. Even seeds make good choices.
- **TIP:** Keep your portions in check! One serving of nuts or seeds is about the size of a golf ball.

Drink Up!

Drinking plain old water can help with your weight management program, especially if you are substituting calorie-containing beverages like regular soda, juice and sweetened coffee for water, which is healthy and calorie-free. For some people, drinking water throughout the day also keeps their hands busy so that they're less likely to eat out of habit or boredom.

- **DRINK MORE water** throughout the day, aiming for about 8 cups total. Some calorie-free beverages can make good choices, but moderation is important. Remember you should be drinking half of your weight in ounces of water per day.
- **TIP:** Don't drink your calories. Calories from beverages add up quickly and affect your weight. Most people don't pay attention to the number of calories they drink, and that can hurt your weight loss efforts. Limit your intake of caloric beverages to less than 200 calories each day, and be sure to add these calories to your log.

Make It Work

Now that you know which foods have the staying power, it is important to spread these satisfying foods throughout the day into designated meals and snacks. Then you'll be reaping the benefits all day long.

Even better, slow down and savor every bite. Research has shown that it can take 20 minutes for your stomach to signal your brain that you have reached satiety. So take your time and enjoy every delicious bite along the way.

Get in touch with your satiety center by giving your stomach time to signal your brain that you have had enough to eat, and by selecting the right kinds of foods when you do eat. Finding ways to feel fuller while eating fewer calories—