

Bump Up Your Fiber for Better Health

A fiber-rich diet may help protect against heart disease, diabetes, cancer, diverticulosis, constipation and even weight gain. Are you getting enough fiber in your diet?

Most Americans get less than half of the recommended 25 grams to 35 grams of fiber per day. A lack of fruits, veggies and whole grains, combined with increased processed and junk foods, has caused us to fall way short of our fiber goals.

Fiber pills, drinks and bars can be found in any drug store or supermarket, but your best bet is to get your fiber from whole foods. Foods that are naturally rich in fiber offer a host of vitamins and minerals, and are minimally processed to boot. Here are some ideas to get your started.

Fruits and vegetables (2-3 grams per serving)

Aim for seven servings a day. When planning a meal, make half your plate fruits and/or vegetables.

- Add grapes, mandarin oranges and red onions to a salad
- Create veggie-based meals like acorn squash stuffed with brown rice
- Puree veggies and add to soups
- Blend fruits or veggies with yogurt and fruit juice for a breakfast smoothie

Dried beans, peas and lentils (5-8 grams per serving)

Try lentils, black-eyed peas, split peas, chickpeas or black, pinto, navy, kidney or lima beans.

- Make a lentil, split pea or black bean soup
- Add beans to your salad
- Puree beans and add them to soup or tomato sauce for thickening
- Serve cold bean salad as a side dish

Whole grains (3-7 grams per serving)

Whole grains contain the nutrient rich bran and germ, where all of the fiber is held.

- Opt for brown rice, quinoa, kasha, bulgur or barley instead of white rice
- Look for 100 percent whole-wheat or whole-grain bread, crackers or pasta
- Enjoy oatmeal for breakfast
- Switch from white to whole-wheat flour for baking

Nuts and seeds (2-3 grams per ounce)

Nuts and seeds are high in calories, so keep portions to an ounce or two per day.

- Snack on raw nuts along with a piece of fruit
- Add walnuts or almonds to your morning hot or cold cereal
- Toss sunflower seeds into yogurt
- Sprinkle ground flax seed on cereal, yogurt or cottage cheese

Finally, be sure to drink plenty of fluids and increase fiber gradually to give your body time to adjust. This minimizes bloating and gas.

