

by Margy Squires

Fiber is one of the most important elements in a healthy diet. Fiber is colorful! It's delicious!

However, thanks to television, the image that pops to mind when you mention the word is one of an unhappy person—desperately trying to mix and swallow a lumpy, gritty concoction of the leading fiber drink.

But adding dietary fiber is as easy and tasty as adding food to your plate! Bright red strawberries, yellow and green squash, spinach salad and swirls of warm pasta. It's enough to make you drool in anticipation. What's more, fiber is typically low calorie so people who eat a high fiber diet are seldom overweight.

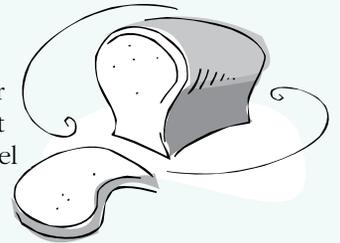
F.I.B.R.O. Diet Plan

The Fiber Factor

Fiber is the indigestible part of plants, typically fruits, grains and veggies. Of the two types, soluble and insoluble, both are equally beneficial. Because fiber is not digested, it passes through the intestines like a broom, sweeping it “clean” of many potentially harmful elements. The American Cancer Institute recommends 20-35 grams of fiber daily but America's diet is typically a paltry 8-15 grams a day. It's no wonder we're constipated, overweight, have low immunity and headed for diabetes and heart disease. A third of Americans over 45 have diverticulitis (inflammation of the intestines), linked to low fiber intake. Research shows that a high fiber diet eliminates excess cholesterol, keeps toxic material from building up and re-entering the bloodstream, and lowers your risk for insulin resistance disorders such as Metabolic Syndrome and diabetes.

What to eat

Let's get down to basics. The worst enemy of fiber is refined grains (remember the “white is light in fiber” rule). Here's where reading a food label is critically important, even when the package says “whole grain”. The FDA has approved the use of “a good source of fiber” only on foods containing 3 grams or more of fiber per serving. Given that heart disease, diabetes and obesity are the leading health challenges, the FDA revised its recommendations (mypyramid.gov, Jan 05) to include more servings of whole grains, as well as fresh fruits and mixed, colorful vegetables. Choosing whole grains is one big step in the right direction.



Change what you put in your shopping cart (see box). More supermarkets are adding health food aisles. Check out Vitaspelt's pastas (tastier than wheat) at 5 grams a serving, Add chopped veggies and you've got more fiber and primavera. Heritage Flakes cereal has 6 grams per 3/4 cup serving (and is low cal, low carb). Boost benefits with a topping of berries. Chopped tomato, peppers, onion and garlic pack more to pinto beans' 7 grams without adding much more calorie-wise. In a hurry? A cup of Walnut Acres' canned minestrone soup is a fast 5 grams. Pair it with 3 Rye-Krisp crackers for 2 grams more. Carry snack bags of dried figs, raisins, bran cereal and nuts (watch portions as these foods are high in natural sugar and friendly fat so they are higher in calories). Eat fresh, whole fruits with peels, oranges with white pulp, a thick slice of watermelon. Crunch on raw carrot sticks, celery and radishes. Little changes, big health benefits.



Easy does it

If your diet has previously been low fiber, you'll need to make changes gradually. Adding high fiber too fast will cause bloating, gas and aggravate constipation. Start slowly, adding 5 grams or so every couple of days. Drink

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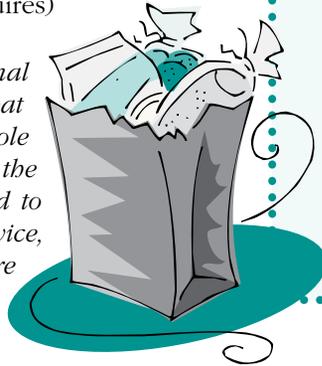
The Fiber Factor

continued

plenty of water. A good rule is to drink your weight in water (160 pounds equals 160 ounces or 10 16-oz glasses). No whining about water when most can slurp down those supersized 24 to 48 oz soft drinks! Your body is 70% water so it's the most natural thing for you to drink. Fiber needs water to mix and move with. Your health goal is to have at least one bowel movement a day. Fiber is our health friend! Time to stop reading and make out that grocery list. Let's go shopping!

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A High Fiber Shopping List

Food	Serving size	Grams Fiber
Apple w/skin	1 medium	3.1
Beans (most)	1/2 Cup	5.0
Broccoli	3/4 Cup	7.0
Figs	3 dried	10.5
Green Beans	1/2 cup	2.1
Oatmeal	1 cup	4.0
Orange	1 medium	3.0
Pear	1 fresh	4.0
Peas	1/2 Cup	9.1
Spelt Pasta	1/2 cup	5.0
Strawberries	1 cup, fresh	3.9
Watermelon	1 Slice	2.8
Zucchini	1/2 Cup	3.0

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