

## **F is for Fiber!**

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Looking to add more fiber to your diet? Fiber – along with adequate fluid intake – moves quickly and relatively easily through your digestive tract and helps it function properly. This is only one of the many ways fiber contributes to good health.

Fiber helps prevent:

- Heart Disease: Fiber may aid in the prevention of heart disease by helping lower your LDL (low-density lipoprotein) or “bad” cholesterol.
- Diabetes: Fiber helps control blood sugar levels for people with diabetes.
- Digestive Problems: Adequate amounts of fiber from foods can help prevent constipation and hemorrhoids.
- Weight Gain: A high-fiber eating plan is lower in calories and tends to make you feel full faster.

Fiber is a non-digestible form of carbohydrates that occurs naturally in plant foods. There are many kinds of fibers. Soluble fiber, which is linked to lowering LDL-cholesterol levels, is found in legumes, oats, barley, nuts and some fruits and vegetables. Insoluble fiber – found in whole grains, wheat bran, nuts, seeds and some fruits and vegetables – acts like a sponge, passing through the intestines mostly unchanged, thus helping to promote good bowel mobility. Non-digestive oligosaccharides found in some fruits, vegetables, seeds and grains resist digestion and act as a probiotic to promote gut health. Isolated fibers are chemically synthesized or extracted from plant foods and added to foods containing little or no fiber.

Adding isolated fiber to so many different foods might seem to be a panacea for a low-fiber diet, but this trend is raising questions. The food industry has hijacked the advice to eat more fiber by putting isolated, highly processed fiber into what are essentially junk foods. Most people know that an apple is a healthier choice than a high-fiber brownie, but when they see high-fiber counts on the label, it may just be enough to convince them to go with the brownie. Remember, a dessert is a dessert is a dessert, no ifs ands or buts about it.

The recommended daily amount of fiber is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. Only 5% of Americans are meeting the daily recommendations, so it shouldn't be surprising that the average intake of dietary fiber is pitifully low – only 15 grams per day on average.

Ways to Add Fiber to Your Eating Plan:

- Add fiber to foods you already eat:
  - Sprinkle oat bran or rice bran on cereal
  - Add almonds or fresh fruit to salads
  - Include dried beans in soup

- Mix ground flaxseed into muffins
- Eat whole fruit rather than drinking juice
  - ½ cup raspberries = 4 grams fiber
  - ½ cup blueberries = 4 grams fiber
  - 1 cup strawberries = 3 grams fiber
  - 1 small banana = 3 grams fiber
  - 1 small apple = 4 grams fiber
  - 1 small pear = 5 grams fiber
  - 1 large orange = 4 grams fiber
  - ½ cup dates = 7 grams fiber
  - 2 dried figs = 4 grams fiber
- Select vegetables with lots of soluble fiber such as Brussels sprouts, acorn squash, lima beans, broccoli, cabbage, green beans, onions, parsnips, turnips, carrots, okra and eggplant.
- Look for whole grain products made with oats, barley, whole wheat, whole corn, whole rice, and quinoa.
- Add vegetables to sandwiches or eat a peanut butter sandwich on whole grain bread.
- Have bean dips or hummus for snacks.
- Healthy fats with one or more grams of soluble fiber are 2 tablespoons of avocado, 1 tablespoon whole chia seeds, and 2 tablespoons ground flax seeds.
- Eat lean protein foods that have fiber like black beans, navy beans, lima beans, pinto beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas and soy beans.
- A natural fiber supplement like psyllium, a plant-seed powder, can also be taken. Start with a small dose mixed with water then slowly increase the dose, taking as directed. Drink extra water as you increase your fiber intake. Fluid needs vary, but 9 to 12 cups of fluid a day are recommended for most healthy people.

The new labeling guidelines ensure that good sources of fiber contain a minimum of 5 grams. To combat the fiber as whole grain dilemma, look for the word “whole” as the first one on the ingredient list. Be wary of products that contain partially-hydrogenated oils or large amounts of added sugar.

From beans to vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts and seeds, plant foods are a nutrient-dense source of natural dietary fiber. Consuming plant foods will increase fiber intake, while simultaneously providing a whole host of health-promoting and disease-fighting nutrients and phytochemicals. It is all a part of a winning strategy for better health!

### **Southwestern Black Bean, Quinoa, and Mango Salad**

Makes six 1-cup servings

#### *Ingredients*

- 1 15-oz. can black beans, no salt added, rinsed, drained (1 ¾ cups)
- 1 cup cooked quinoa (according to package directions)

1 cup frozen corn  
1 small red bell pepper, chopped  
1 cup chopped fresh mango  
¼ cup chopped red onion  
½ cup fresh cilantro, chopped (or 2 tsp. dried)  
1 small, fresh jalapeño pepper, seeded, finely diced  
1 lemon, juiced  
1 ½ tbsp. extra virgin olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
½ tsp. cumin  
½ tsp. chili powder  
¼ tsp. turmeric

*Directions*

1. Mix beans, quinoa, corn, bell pepper, mango, onion, cilantro, and jalapeño together in a mixing bowl.
2. Whisk lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, cumin, chili powder, and turmeric and small bowl. Toss into salad mixture and chill salad until serving time.

*Nutrient analysis per serving:* Calories – 164; Total fat – 4 g.; Sat. fat – 1 g.; Sodium – 93 mg.; Total carbohydrates – 27 g.; Fiber – 7 g.; Protein – 6 g.