

BEANS, BEANS, THEY'RE GOOD FOR YOUR HEART...



WHAT IS FIBER?

WHY IS FIBER ESSENTIAL TO HEALTH?

HOW CAN I INCREASE MY FIBER INTAKE?

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

It is safe to say that most people associate dietary fiber with pooping. My early understanding of fiber was that it makes you poop more, and that foods like bran muffins and prunes are helpful for their fiber content. I also remember my grandfather mixing Metamucil with orange juice, which never seemed appetizing. In general, associating any food with poop is probably not good for its reputation. Luckily, the health benefits of fiber go way beyond regulating bowel movements and the foods that increase dietary fiber intake are diverse and delicious.

Fiber is a carbohydrate found in plants. Since the human body cannot fully digest fiber, it does not break down into sugar like other carbohydrates. Instead, fiber passes through the gastrointestinal (GI) tract imparting many benefits along the way. The two main types of dietary fiber, soluble and insoluble, have their own health benefits which we will explore in more detail.

Cardiovascular Disease

Both types of fiber are important for heart health. Soluble fibers are particularly helpful for lowering LDL (bad cholesterol) levels.¹ High overall fiber intake can decrease triglyceride levels, blood pressure, and markers of inflammation in the body.² It has also been linked to a 40% reduction in the risk of coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.³ In fact, research suggests that high dietary fiber consumption is also associated with reduced all-cause mortality, meaning it can help you live longer.⁴

Weight Management

Foods that are high in fiber also tend to have more water in them, making them less energy-dense than processed foods. As a result, you can eat fewer calories in the same volume of food and feel more full. High-fiber foods also require more chewing and take longer to eat. Once in the stomach, soluble fiber dissolves in water and forms a gel that slows passage of food into the intestines. Slower eating and stomach emptying mean you stay full longer and feel the need to snack less. These fiber benefits reduce overeating and help maintain a healthy weight.



Type 2 Diabetes

People who consume higher amounts of insoluble fiber have a lower risk of type 2 diabetes. In those who already have diabetes, soluble fiber slows the absorption of sugar and improves blood sugar levels.¹

Digestive Health

Of course, we cannot finish talking about the benefits of fiber without returning to poop. Once your food passes the stomach, insoluble fiber increases the stool bulk and helps it pass more easily through your intestines. Constipation is the most common GI complaint in the United States and fiber – particularly from wheat and oat bran – helps prevent and relieve it.³ Similarly, dietary fiber reduces the risk of hemorrhoids and diverticulitis (inflammation of the intestines).^{1,3} So yes, fiber does help you poop happier and healthier.



How do I increase my fiber intake?

Fiber only comes from plants, so make sure you eat plenty on a regular basis. Unfortunately, only an estimated 5% of the US population consumes enough fiber, so you may not either.² The minimum recommended fiber intake for adults is 25 g/day for women and 38 g/day for men, but studies have shown that even more fiber results in additional health benefits.^{2,5} Since fiber absorbs water, you may want to hydrate more while increasing your fiber intake. Most plants have both types of fiber, but soluble fibers are most plentiful in foods like beans, oats, fruits, and vegetables, while insoluble fibers are high in whole wheat, bran, nuts, and beans. Since there are no known significant adverse effects of high amounts of fiber intake, eat up! If you have questions about how to get more fiber in your life, let us know and we can help!



Sources:

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