



Fiber is Your Friend

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in part in tastebud magazine, Sept. 2009

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Fiber. It's not a very...sexy topic. Just the word conjures up images of Metamucil commercials with the sandy-looking granules swirling in a glass and promises of becoming "regular." But the benefits of a high fiber diet are many and certainly extend beyond the water closet.

Most Americans are fiber deficient, largely because of the typical Western diet, which is chock full of processed sugar and processed carbohydrates in the form white rice and white flour, which includes most breads and pasta. According to Dr. Steven Masley, MD, "The most clinically important deficiency in the American diet is fiber. Fiber intake in the United States averages 12-15 g daily, while nearly all recommendations suggest 30-50g."

Unlike macronutrients (fats, proteins, and carbohydrates) that our bodies break down and absorb, dietary fiber (also known as roughage or bulk) isn't actually digested. It comes in two forms, soluble and insoluble; both are essential and can be obtained from a wide variety of yummy, high-fiber foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and legumes.

A Seedy Recommendation

Psyllium seed and ground flaxseeds are also excellent sources of fiber and flaxseeds especially can be added to many dishes. Psyllium seed is the primary ingredient in products like Metamucil, although I don't recommend these products, as they don't provide the vitamins, minerals, and other disease-fighting phytonutrients and antioxidants that high fiber, whole foods do. Yet some people may need a supplement, especially if they have certain medical conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome. It's also important to note that there may be a risk of drug interactions. Always check with your doctor before taking fiber supplements.

Because of the common fiber-constipation association (you're not allowed to laugh if you've never had it), many of you may not be aware of the many other benefits of adequate fiber intake:

- **Weight loss:** What if I told you that fiber may be your best friend if you're trying to lose weight? According to Monica Reinagle, licensed nutritionist, "Trying to lose weight on a low-fiber diet is like parallel parking without power steering." Foods rich in fiber are filling, which means you eat less and stay fuller longer.
- **Lowers risk of digestive conditions** such as irritable bowel syndrome

HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



- **Lowers risk of heart disease** by getting rid of digestive debris and environmental toxins and keeping bad cholesterol in check
- **Lowers risk of diabetes** by controlling blood sugar levels

If you think you may be fiber deficient, slow and steady wins the race. Going overboard and increasing your intake with gusto can cause gas, bloating, and/or diarrhea. And drink plenty of water. If you don't, you may end up with a problem that you were trying to thwart!

Little Here, Little There

- Add nuts, seeds, and flaxseeds to whole grain cereals, salads, soups, and smoothies
- Snack on raw veggies
- Beans and lentils play well with others; use them in soups, salads and many of your other favorite dishes
- Choose whole grain products vs. refined, like crackers, cereal, bread, tortillas, and pasta (Beware, as many so-called whole wheat products are made with white flour. Avoid "unbleached flour" and "flour," both of which are merely white flour.)
- Eat fruit as a dessert or snack; the skin and/or seeds is where you'll get the most fiber (berries are your best choice, as they're low on the glycemic index)
- Incorporate all kinds of vegetables into every meal that you can – it all counts!

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