



## What is Fiber?

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate found in plant foods. Unlike other carbohydrates, the body can't digest fiber. Instead, fiber passes through the body, performing important functions in the process. The type of function performed depends on the type of fiber consumed. Plant foods contain two types of fiber—soluble and insoluble.

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| <b>Soluble Fiber</b>   | <p>This type of fiber dissolves in water and slows the digestion of glucose, the basic form of sugar used by the body for energy. It can lower blood sugar levels and can help lower blood cholesterol.</p> <p>Good food sources of soluble fiber include apples, artichokes, asparagus, bananas, barley, beans, berries, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, dark leafy greens, legumes, lentils, nuts, oats, pears, peppers, and squash.</p> |
| <b>Insoluble Fiber</b> | <p>This type of fiber absorbs water, but does not dissolve in water. It helps move food and waste through the digestive system, which promotes regular bowel movements and prevents constipation.</p> <p>Good food sources of insoluble fiber include bran, carrots, cucumbers, legumes, nuts, seeds, tomatoes, and whole grains.</p>  |

Consuming too little fiber can cause high blood sugar levels, stomach or abdominal pain, and tiredness or nausea after eating. On the other hand, a diet high in fiber reduces the risk of certain conditions like heart disease, diabetes, cancer, hemorrhoids, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

In order to get the full benefits of fiber, plant foods must be eaten in their whole form, or close to their whole form. While fresh fruit and vegetable juices contain vitamins and minerals, they do not contain the beneficial fiber found in their source foods.

### Increasing Your Fiber Intake

It is generally recommended that adults consume about 25–35 grams of fiber per day from food. However, most adults in the U.S. consume about half that amount. To increase your intake of fiber, try these tips:

- Aim to consume 5–10 servings of fresh vegetables per day.
- Incorporate fresh, whole fruits and vegetables into every meal or snack.
- Choose whole grain rice, breads, and pastas over products made with refined or white flour.
- Get creative. If a recipe calls for animal protein, try making the dish with beans or legumes instead. This works well with chili, soups, and stews.
- Swap juices for smoothies, using the same ingredients. The taste will be similar, and the fiber lost during the juicing process will be blended into the smoothie.

### References

- Fiber. The Nutrition Source. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/fiber/>. Published April 12, 2016. Accessed January 12, 2017.
- Sienkiewicz Sizer F, Whitney E. *Nutrition Concepts & Controversies*. 12th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning; 2011.