

Easy Ways to Boost Fiber in Your Daily Diet

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Fiber is an essential nutrient. However, most Americans fall far short of the recommended daily amount in their diets. Women should aim for 25 grams of fiber per day, while men should target 38 grams (or 21 and 30 grams daily, respectively, for those over the age of 50).

Dietary fiber contributes to health and wellness in a number of ways. First, it aids in providing fullness after meals, which helps promote a healthy weight. Second, adequate fiber intake can help to lower cholesterol. Third, it helps prevent constipation and diverticulosis. And fourth, adequate fiber from food helps keep blood sugar within a healthy range.

Natural Sources of Fiber

Fiber is found only in plant foods. Eating the skin or peel of fruits and vegetables provides a greater dose of fiber, which is found naturally in these sources. Fiber also is found in beans and lentils, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Typically, the more refined or processed a food, the lower its fiber content. For example, one medium apple with the peel contains 4.4 grams of fiber, while ½ cup of applesauce contains 1.4 grams, and 4 ounces of apple juice contains no fiber.

Here are a few foods that are naturally high in fiber:

- 1 large pear with skin (7 grams)
- 1 cup fresh raspberries (8 grams)
- ½ medium avocado (5 grams)
- 1 ounce almonds (3.5 grams)
- ½ cup cooked black beans (7.5 grams)
- 3 cups air-popped popcorn (3.6 grams)
- 1 cup cooked pearled barley (6 grams)

When increasing fiber, be sure to do it gradually and with plenty of fluids. As dietary fiber travels through the digestive tract, is similar to a new sponge; it needs water to plump up pass smoothly. If you consume more than your usual intake of fiber but not enough fluid, you may experience nausea or constipation.

Before you reach for the fiber supplements, consider this: fiber is found naturally in nutritious foods. Studies have found the same benefits, such as a feeling of fullness, may not result from fiber supplements or from fiber-enriched foods. If you're missing out on your daily amount of fiber, you may be trailing in other essential nutrients as well. Your fiber intake is a good gauge for overall diet quality. Try to reach your fiber goal with unrefined foods so you get all the other benefits they provide as well.