



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## NUTRI-NEWS Q&A

### Finding right balance of fiber a tough task

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**Cinda Williams Chima**  
University of Akron

I would like to increase the fiber in my diet, but I'm not sure what my target should be or how to know how much I'm getting. I'm trying to read labels, but it's confusing.

An unexpected side effect of the recent low-carbohydrate craze is the plethora of high-fiber and whole-grain products that have entered the marketplace.

Until recently, these products could be found only in specialty markets or health-food stores. Some of the new durum-wheat pastas labeled as low carbohydrate pack a whopping 12 grams of fiber per serving. Strictly speaking, these foods are not actually lower in carbohydrates, because fiber is, well, a carbohydrate. But because fiber is not digested and absorbed, it doesn't raise blood sugar or contribute calories.

The choices you make will depend on your health goals:

Soluble fiber is found in oats, barley, some fruits and vegetables, and beans and peas. It lowers blood cholesterol.

Insoluble fiber is found in wheat bran, corn and oat bran, some vegetables and fruit and vegetable skins. It improves bowel health, preventing constipation, hemorrhoids and diverticulosis.

For most people, increasing overall fiber and whole grain intake is a good goal. The average American fiber intake is 10 to 15 grams a day. The Dietary Reference intakes for total fiber for adults ranges from 21 to 38 grams a day. There's probably no benefit to intakes higher than 50 grams, and extremely high fiber diets may cause problems.

How much fiber are you getting? For a quick estimate, multiply your fruit and vegetable servings by 1.5 grams, your whole grain servings by 2.5 grams and refined grains by 1 gram per serving. Then add specific fiber amounts for legumes, nuts, seeds and high-fiber cereals.

A cautionary note: Fiber intake should be increased gradually (over several weeks or months) and be accompanied by plenty of fluid (at least 2 quarts a day) to prevent blockages. Fruits and vegetables should be chewed thoroughly. Regular exercise will help move things along.

## SOME GRAINS OF TRUTH ON FIBER

There's a lot to know about fiber. Here are some important points.

Tips for increasing fiber in your diet

1. Where you find fiber: Remember that fiber is found only in plant foods, never in meat or dairy products. Therefore, a high-fiber diet is going to feature a higher proportion of plant foods.
2. Eat closer to nature: The less refined and processed the food you eat, the higher in fiber. Candy, pastry

and snack foods are typically low in fiber and high in fat and calories.

3. Include more produce: Increase your consumption of vegetables, especially beans and peas, fruits, edible skins, seeds and hulls. A good goal is at least 2 cups of fruit and 21.2 cups of vegetables a day for a 2,000-calorie diet (U.S. Dietary Guidelines).

4. Think whole-grain: Increase whole-grain breads, cereals and flours. A good goal is at least three servings of whole grains a day.

5. Supplement cautiously: Use of fiber supplements containing psyllium husk or methylcellulose can be an efficient way to increase fiber in the diet. Ask your doctor or dietitian about their use. Just remember that epidemiological studies showing the benefits of high fiber diets are based on intakes of whole foods.

#### Making the shift to high-fiber cooking

" Leave skins on fruits and vegetables.

" Try whole grain flour in recipes; start by substituting whole wheat for half the white.

" Add wheat germ, wheat bran or rice bran to recipes.

" Add beans and peas to salads, soups, dips and spreads.

" Substitute beans, wheat germ, oats, or wheat bran for part of the meat in meat loaf, meatballs or pasta dishes.

" Use some of the new whole grain pastas.

#### Looking for fiber on food labels

It's not enough that the bread is brown. First, look at the ingredient list. Ingredients are listed from most to least on food labels. The first ingredient should be a whole grain, such as whole wheat flour. (Remember, in regard to labeling, the phrase "whole wheat flour" can be legally substituted for refined white flour.) There may be several sources of fiber in one product, for example, wheat bran, flaxseed and nuts. How many grams of fiber are there per serving? The Food and Drug Administration has established definitions for label claims about fiber. Good source of fiber: Product must contain 2.5 to 4.75 grams per serving.

High fiber: Product contains at least 5 grams per serving.

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