

Fibre is your Friend - Bulk of Research Confirms it's an Important Part of Daily Diet

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Question: Recently I read that eating a high-fibre diet was not the answer if you want to stay healthy? I am confused whether I should even bother with my high-fibre cereal that I have for breakfast every morning?

Every where we turn, there is another headline on diet, nutrition and health. Unfortunately, today's consumers are bombarded with mixed messages and it can be confusing. Today, 59 % of Canadians admit to being bewildered by the amount of knowledge they are expected to have on healthy eating and fibre is not an exception.

In the media, over the last few weeks, there has been some controversy over recent findings on fibre. The important thing to remember is that this is just one study. There are hundreds of medical and scientific research that establishes the health benefits of fibre and it's daily importance.

Numerous research studies have shown us how it may reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, how it keeps our bowels healthy and prevents constipation. Time and time again, we see that fibre can help lower cholesterol, help us to maintain a healthy weight, and manage high blood pressure.

What is Fibre Exactly?

Fibre is a nutrient found in plants. Our bodies do not digest fibre the same way as other nutrients, and oddly enough, this is the reason why it is good for us. There are two types of fibre, insoluble and soluble. Insoluble fibre is not soluble in water and is bowel friendly, because it helps maintain regularity. Insoluble fibre is found in wheat bran, whole-wheat bread, corn, flaxseeds and some vegetables (especially in the skins).

The second type of fibre, soluble, forms a gel and is soluble in water. These properties make soluble fibre heart friendly, as it may help lower blood cholesterol, and reduce risks associated with diabetes, by helping control blood sugar levels. Soluble fibre is found in fruits, such as apples and oranges, vegetables, like carrots and eggplant, and grains such as oat bran, and oatmeal.

Legumes (dried beans) including kidney beans and lentils, contain insoluble and soluble fibres. All foods that contain fibre, contain some of each type. Most high fibre foods contain more insoluble than soluble fibre, in a ratio of about 3 or 4 grams to 1 gram.

Getting Enough can be Tough

Many Canadians only consume about half the daily fibre intake recommended by health care professionals. The recommended total fibre intake for men, age 19 to 50, is 38 grams each day (and over 50 years the amount is 30 grams). Women need 25 grams of fibre each day, if they are between the ages 19 to 50 years (and 21 grams if they are over 50). To achieve this level Canada's Guidelines to Healthy Eating emphasize plenty of cereals, breads, grains, vegetables and fruits.

Not all foods contain the same amount of fibre. Take a look at the nutrition labels and look for grains from “whole grains” You can also check the “Nutrition Facts” table found on the product package. The amount of fibre in the product is listed in grams (g) under Carbohydrate in the Nutrition Facts table.

Look for nutrient claims on fibre that may be made by the manufacturer:

- “source” of fibre if it contains at least 2 g of fibre per serving;
- a “high source” of fibre if it contains at least 4 grams of fibre per serving; and
- “very high source” if it contains at least 6 grams of fibre per serving.

Fruits and vegetables contain fibre, and can range from 1 to 5 grams per serving depending on the type.

It is Easy to Fibre Up

- It is not difficult to increase your fibre intake, however do it gradually to give your body time to adjust. Be sure to drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day.
- Choose high fibre foods more often. Try each day to include brown rice, whole-wheat pastas and high-fibre cereals. Start your day with a high fibre cereal with psyllium or oat bran for breakfast.
- Choose whole grain breads that contain at least 2 grams of fibre per slice.
- Eat more vegetables and fresh fruit for snacks, including the skins when appropriate.
- Include beans in your diet. Enjoy a bowl of chili made with beans, lentils and vegetables. Add more beans to salads and soups.

Interested in learning how better nutrition can help you?

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