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Patient education: High-fiber diet (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is fiber?

Fiber is a substance found in some fruits, vegetables, and grains. Most fiber passes through your body without being digested. But it can affect how you digest other foods, and it can also improve your bowel movements.

There are 2 kinds of fiber. One kind is called "soluble fiber" and is found in fruits, oats, barley, beans, and peas. The other kind is called "insoluble fiber," and is found in wheat, rye, and other grains.

Both kinds of fiber that you eat are called "dietary fiber."

Why is fiber important to my health?

Fiber can help make your bowel movements softer and more regular. Adding fiber to your diet can help with problems including constipation, hemorrhoids, and diarrhea. Plus, it can help prevent "accidents" if you have trouble controlling your bowel movements.

Getting enough fiber can also help lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. That's because fiber can help lower cholesterol and help control blood sugar.

How much fiber do I need?

The recommended amount of fiber is 20 to 35 grams a day. The nutrition label on packaged foods can show you how much fiber you are getting in each serving ([figure 1](#)).

How can I make sure I'm getting enough fiber?

To make sure that you're getting enough fiber, eat plenty of the fruits, vegetables, and grains that contain fiber ([table 1](#) and [figure 2](#)). Many breakfast cereals also have a lot of fiber.

If you can't get enough fiber from food, you can add wheat bran to the foods you do eat. Or you can take fiber supplements. These come in the form of powders, wafers, or pills. They include [psyllium](#) seed (sample brand names: Metamucil, Konsyl), [methylcellulose](#) (sample brand name: Citrucel), [polycarbophil](#) (sample brand name: FiberCon), and [wheat dextrin](#) (sample brand name: Benefiber). If you take a fiber supplement, be sure to read the label so you know how much to take. If you're not sure, ask your doctor nurse.

What are the side effects of fiber?

When you start eating more fiber, your belly might feel bloated, or you might have gas or cramps. You can avoid these side effects by adding fiber to your diet slowly.

Some people feel worse when they eat more fiber or take fiber supplements. If you feel worse after adding more fiber to your diet, you can try decreasing the amount of fiber to see if that helps.

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GRAPHICS

Nutrition label - fiber

Nutrition Facts	
about 9 servings per container	
Serving size	1 Cup (59g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	190
% Daily Value *	
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
<i>Trans</i> Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 0g	
Monounsaturated Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 210mg	9%
Total Carbohydrate 46g	17%
Dietary Fiber 7g	25%
Total Sugars 18g	
Includes 9g Added Sugars	18%
Protein 5g	
Vitamin D 4mcg	20%
Calcium 25mg	0%
Iron 4.4mg	20%
Potassium 390mg	8%
Thiamin	10%
Riboflavin	10%
Niacin	10%
Vitamin B ₂	10%
Folate 80 mcg DFE (48mcg folic acid)	20%
Vitamin B ₁₂	10%
Phosphorus	20%
Magnesium	20%
Zinc	10%
Copper	10%

* The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

This is an example of a nutrition label. To figure out how much fiber is in a

food, look for the line that says "Dietary Fiber." It's also important to look at the serving size. This food has 7 grams of fiber in each serving, and each serving is 1 cup.

?: percent.

Graphic 51585 Version 7.0

Amount of fiber in different foods

Food	Serving	Grams of fiber
Fruits		
Apple (with skin)	1 medium apple	4.4
Banana	1 medium banana	3.1
Oranges	1 orange	3.1
Prunes	1 cup, pitted	12.4
Juices		
Apple, unsweetened, with added ascorbic acid	1 cup	0.5
Grapefruit, white, canned, sweetened	1 cup	0.2
Grape, unsweetened, with added ascorbic acid	1 cup	0.5
Orange	1 cup	0.7
Vegetables		
Cooked		
▪ Green beans	1 cup	4.0
▪ Carrots	1/2 cup sliced	2.3
▪ Peas	1 cup	8.8
▪ Potato (baked, with skin)	1 medium potato	3.8
Raw		
▪ Cucumber (with peel)	1 cucumber	1.5
▪ Lettuce	1 cup shredded	0.5
▪ Tomato	1 medium tomato	1.5
▪ Spinach	1 cup	0.7
Legumes		
▪ Baked beans, canned, no salt added	1 cup	13.9
▪ Kidney beans, canned	1 cup	13.6
▪ Lima beans, canned	1 cup	11.6
▪ Lentils, boiled	1 cup	15.6
Breads, pastas, flours		
Bran muffins	1 medium muffin	5.2
Oatmeal, cooked	1 cup	4.0
White bread	1 slice	0.6
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	1.9

Pasta and rice, cooked		
■ Macaroni	1 cup	2.5
■ Rice, brown	1 cup	3.5
■ Rice, white	1 cup	0.6
■ Spaghetti (regular)	1 cup	2.5
Nuts		
Almonds	1/2 cup	8.7
Peanuts	1/2 cup	7.9

To learn how much fiber and other nutrients are in different foods, visit the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) FoodData Central website.

Data from: USDA FoodData Central. Available at: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/> (Accessed on October 11, 2019).

Graphic 52349 Version 6.0

Foods with fiber



Foods with a lot of fiber include prunes, apples, oranges, bananas, peas, green beans, kidney beans, cooked oatmeal, almonds, peanuts, and whole-wheat bread.

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