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Fabulous Fiber

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Fiber can substantially reduce your risk of death.



Fiber can help you manage diabetes and heart disease.

Fabulous Fiber

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Consumer interest in high fiber foods has increased substantially during the past few years. Companies are creating many foods that claim a high fiber content. Polydextrose used for sweetening donuts, cellulose added to your bread or carob bean gum to thicken your pudding or sour cream—these are all dietary fibers, but not exactly the optimal way to get fiber into your diet.

How much fiber do we need? It depends upon our age and gender. Approximately 20–35 grams a day is recommended for optimal health, with less for small children. One-half cup of beans typically provides four to eight grams, while a serving of whole grain breads, cereals or muffins may have two to seven grams of fiber. Fruits and vegetables typically supply three to five grams per serving, while an ounce of nuts has three grams. And the fiber provides more health benefits than just alleviating constipation.

A Dutch study recently found that for every additional ten grams of daily fiber intake, there was a decline of nine percent in all causes of death in the participants. The greatest benefit of the extra ten grams of fiber was a 17 percent drop in risk of death from heart disease.

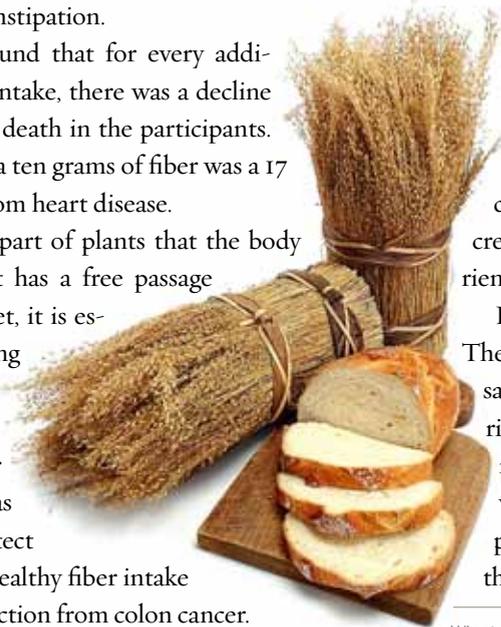
What is fiber? Fiber is the part of plants that the body does not digest and absorb. It has a free passage through the small intestines. Yet, it is essential for good health. Getting plenty of fiber helps prevent hemorrhoids, since fiber will help form softer and bulkier stools. Fiber-rich foods, such as popcorn and nuts, actually protect against diverticular disease. A healthy fiber intake is also believed to provide protection from colon cancer.

There are different types of fiber. The water-insoluble

fiber found in wheat, rice, nuts and some legumes and vegetables helps stimulate peristalsis and assists with bowel regularity. The water-soluble fiber found in fruits, peas and beans, flax, carrots and squash, oatmeal and barley have gelling properties that slow down starch digestion and glucose absorption. This translates into lessened insulin needs. Diabetics who ate a diet high in soluble fiber were shown to have a 30 percent decrease in blood glucose levels. A high fiber meal can also reduce insulin levels in those with insulin resistance.

Foods that are rich in soluble fiber help lower blood cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease. An analysis of two dozen clinical trials revealed that those who increased their fiber intake for two months experienced significant reductions in blood pressure.

Foods rich in fiber help manage your weight. They require significant chewing and increase satiety, since you feel full sooner with foods rich in fiber. Fiber-rich foods are usually lower in fat and calories, and provide a higher food volume to calorie ratio. This usually means people eat less and hence weigh less when their meals are rich in fiber.



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