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Give Yourself a Fiber Boost

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Dietary fiber helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber is important for proper bowel function. It helps reduce constipation and diverticulosis. Fiber-containing foods help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories.

Soluble and insoluble fibers make up the two basic categories of dietary fiber. Insoluble fiber is found in a variety of foods including wheat bran, whole grain products, fruits, and vegetables. Insoluble fibers increase stool bulk and help to regulate bowel movements.

Soluble fibers become gummy in water. This type of fiber actually slows the passage of food through the digestive system. Researchers believe this action helps to regulate cholesterol and glucose (sugar) levels in the blood by affecting absorption rates. Food sources of soluble fibers are dried beans, oats, barley and some fruits and vegetables.

How much is enough? Healthy adults should consume between 20 and 35 grams of dietary fiber each day. Most American men and women eat about 11 grams of dietary fiber daily. Do you need a fiber boost? Here are a few tips:

1. **Read food labels.** The Nutrition Facts Label will tell you the number of dietary fiber grams in each serving of a food.
2. **Start the day with a whole-grain cereal that contains at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.** Top with nuts, raisins, bananas, or berries, all of which are good sources of fiber.
3. **Avoid peeling fruits and vegetables.** Eating the skin ensures that you get every bit of fiber. But rinse with water to remove surface dirt and bacteria before eating. Whole fruits and vegetables contain more fiber than juice.
4. **Eat more whole grain foods** such as barley, brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, quinoa, rolled oats, whole grain corn, whole grain sorghum, popcorn, and whole wheat.
5. **Add beans to soups, stews, and salads.** Include legume-based dishes (such as lentil soup, bean burritos, or rice and beans) in your weekly menu.
6. **Keep fresh and dried fruit on hand.** Choose fruit (fresh, frozen, dried, or canned in 100% fruit juice) as snacks, salads, or desserts.

If you plan to boost your fiber intake, do so gradually! Give the bacteria in your stomach and intestines time to adjust. If you add more fiber too quickly or consume too much on a regular basis, you may end up with gas, diarrhea, cramps, and bloating. Also remember to drink plenty of water and other fluids. You need enough fluids for fiber to do its job.

Sources:

1. Why is it important to eat vegetables? USDA's ChooseMyplate.gov: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/vegetables/vegetables-nutrients-health>
2. Interactive Nutrition Facts Label, Food and Drug Administration: <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/interactivenutritionfactslabel/dietary-fiber.cfm>