

Fuel up on Fiber
San Diego Regional 5 a Day Program
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Did you know that eating fiber keeps you feeling full longer after a meal?
Or that a high fiber diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease by up to 40%?

Fiber is one of those obscure words that we all have heard but few of us actually know what it does for our bodies or where to find it.

Fiber is the part of plants that our bodies cannot digest. It's in all plants we eat including fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans. Fiber is divided into two groups: insoluble and soluble. Both types of fiber are important!

We know insoluble fiber as roughage. Insoluble fiber is found in foods like whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole-grain breakfast cereals, seeds, and some vegetables. This type of fiber softens and adds bulk to stools.

Soluble fiber is contained in oatmeal, nuts, seeds, beans, and fruits like apples and berries. This fiber grabs hold of fatty substances in your digestive tract to help lower blood cholesterol levels. Soluble fiber also plays a role in how the body uses sugars.

Eating fiber not only has an immediate effect on your body, it also protects you in the long run against certain diseases. A high fiber diet has been shown to reduce heart disease by as much as 40% and reduce the risk of Type II Diabetes. A high fiber diet also helps maintain a healthy weight because high fiber foods are low in fat and calories.

We need about 20-35 grams of fiber a day. Most Americans don't even eat half the recommended amount! For kids over the age of 2, the recommended intake is 5 grams + the child's age.

There are many ways to eat more fiber. You should gradually increase fiber in your diet, making sure to drink plenty of water!

Check out these easy ideas:

- Eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day!
- Choose to eat fruit more often than drinking juice. Even 100% juice contains almost no fiber.
- Switch to high fiber snacks like trail mix with nuts and dried fruit or popcorn, instead of chips or candy bars.
- Read the food labels of your favorite foods to see how much fiber they contain.
- Substitute beans for meat a couple times a week. This is easy to do in burritos, chip dips, soups, and chili.
- Try international dishes! Many ethnicities, especially Indian, Middle Eastern, and Hispanic/Latino, use beans and legumes as a central part of the meal.
- Choose higher fiber cereals for breakfast.
- Replace white bread, rice, pasta, and bagels with whole-wheat bread, brown rice, whole-grain pasta and whole-wheat bagels.