

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 get fiber supplements ([table 2](#)). These often come in a powder and should be added to water or another liquid.

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

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Cup (148g/5.3oz)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 100	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Potassium 720mg	21%
Total Carbohydrate 26g	9%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	
Protein 4g	
Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 45%	
Calcium 2% • Iron 6%	
Thiamin 8% • Riboflavin 2%	
Niacin 8% • Vitamin B ₆ 10%	
Folate 6% • Phosphorous 6%	
Zinc 2% • Magnesium 6%	
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.	

Dietary fiber content = 3 grams

This is an example of a nutrition label. To know how much fiber is in a food, look at the line that reads "dietary fiber." This product has 3 grams of fiber in each serving.

%; percent.

Graphic 51585 Version 5.0

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, w/added ascorbic acid	1 cup	0.5
Grapefruit, white, canned, sweetened	1 cup	0.2
Grape, unsweetened, w/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) National Nutrient Database at: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>.

Created using data from the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference. Available at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>.

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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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Over-the-counter fiber supplements

Product	Amount	Frequency
Metamucil	12 years and over: 1 teaspoon or 1 tablespoon, depending on concentration and formulation	1-3 times daily
	6 to 12 years: 1/2 to 1 teaspoon or 1/2 tablespoon, depending on concentration and formulation	
	Under age 6: 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon	
Benefiber	12 years and over: 1 to 2 tablespoons	1-3 times daily
	7 to 11 years: 1/2 to 1 tablespoon	
	Under age 7: 1/4 to 1/2 tablespoon	
Citrucel	12 years and over: 1 rounded tablespoon	1-3 times daily
	6 to 12 years: 1/2 tablespoon	
	Under age 6: 1/4 to 1/2 tablespoon	

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