



Fitness with PJ
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Fibre - It's Your Friend!

I have been suspecting for a while now that Father Time wasn't on my side anymore and that he was starting to become more of a foe than a friend. The recent finding of my first gray hair (but, thank goodness I dye my hair blonde now!), telling my niece the other day (while she had full control of my radio in my truck) to "Turn that crap down!", the awareness of my body's failure to heal itself as quickly as it used to and, just recently, my obsession with buying food products based upon their dietary fibre content have all served to confirm my suspicion.

Dietary fibre used to be something that we thought that only our grandparents needed to help them stay "regular". Not true anymore, as we become aware that dietary fibre has *many* benefits for *many* different age groups.

Dietary fibre is currently found in cereals, breads, fruits and vegetables. There are two types of fibre that we need to eat daily for a healthy diet. *Insoluble fibres* include cellulose, hemicelluloses and lignin, which all make up the structural parts of plant cell walls. A major role of insoluble fibre is to add bulk to our feces and to prevent constipation and associated problems such as hemorrhoids. Good sources of this type of fibre include wheat bran, corn bran, rice, bran, the skins on fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, dried beans and wholegrain foods.

Soluble fibre is the second category of fibre that we need to eat on a daily basis. This includes pectin, gums and mucilage, which are all found mainly in plant cells. One of its major roles is to lower blood cholesterol levels (and it may also help with constipation). When blood cholesterol levels are high, fatty streaks and plaques are deposited along the walls of the arteries. This can make them dangerously narrow and lead to an increased risk of heart disease. Good sources of soluble fibre include fruits, vegetables, oat bran, barley, seed husks, flaxseeds, psyllium, dried beans, lentils, peas, soy milk and soy products.

The principle advantage of a diet high in fibre is the health of the digestive system. The digestive system is lined with muscles that massage the food along the digestive tract from the moment it enters our throats, until the eventual waste is passed out of the bowels. Since fibre is relatively indigestible, it adds bulk to our feces and the soluble fibre soaks up water within our bodies, which then helps plump up the feces and allows it to pass through the gut more easily.

Fibrous foods are also recommended to individuals who are overweight because of their "bulkiness" and tendency to be low in fat. This bulkiness makes the food quite filling leading to eating less. In addition, *soluble fibre* is very important for people looking to lose weight. It forms

a gel-like substance within the digestive tract. This substance slows down the emptying of the stomach and the transit time the food passes through the digestive system, thus extending the time a person feels satisfied or “full”.

For people with diabetes, eating a diet high in fibre slows glucose absorption from the small intestines into the blood. This reduces the possibility of a surge of insulin, the hormone produced by the pancreas to stabilize the blood glucose levels.

What is the recommended daily dietary fibre? For adults 50 years and younger the new limits have been set at 38 grams for men and 25 grams for women and for men over 50 years 30 grams and women 21 grams.

Tips on adding fibre to your diet:

- A good way to start the day is to have a high fibre cereal for breakfast. Look for one that has at least 7 grams of fibre per serving.
- Eat your fruits and vegetables instead of drinking them. Whole foods, with the skins eaten when you can, are higher in fibre than juice is.
- Add lentils or cooked beans to your soups, casseroles, or salads.
- Buy high fibre breads, brown rice, and whole grain pastas, but read your food labels. If your bread, or pasta, has the words “wheat flour”, “enriched wheat flour”, or “multigrain” in the label this doesn’t necessarily mean that they are high in fibre. These are mostly made from white flour, with just a small amount of whole wheat added in. Look for “whole wheat” or “whole grain” and other whole grains, like oats. Don’t be misled by the name of the product either. Names like wheat, whole bran, stoned wheat, 12 grain and others are still mostly white flour. The only way to know for sure is to read the label.
- Add dried fruits, nuts or seeds to yogurt, salads, or muffins.
- Snack on mixed nuts.
- Instead of white rice or pasta as your side dish, serve whole grain brown rice, wild brown rice, quinoa, whole grain barley or bulgur.
- Wash and cut up a large veggie tray and place in your fridge for easy snacking. I also buy the single servings of organic “Tribe” hummus for a healthy lunch side dish or afternoon snack.
- Add ground flax seed, or chia seed to your protein shakes or smoothies.
- When you add fibre to your diet, be sure to add fluid as well.
- Add fibre to your diet slowly for fewer problems with gas and cramping.

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