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Fiber and the Gluten-Free Diet

Updated July 2021

Fiber is an important part of a healthful diet. Consumption of enough fiber can aid in lowering cholesterol and reducing risk of heart disease, and is important for maintaining a healthy gastrointestinal system. High fiber diets have also been linked to lower body weights, since bulkier high fiber foods tend to make us feel full longer, and are also often lower in calories. Estimates indicate that average fiber intake among Americans is only about half the recommended level. Fiber intake among individuals on a gluten-free diet may be even lower, since many gluten-free foods are lower in fiber than their gluten-containing counterparts.

Fiber is found only in plant-based foods. Fiber refers to the part of plant-based foods that cannot be digested by the body. There are two categories of fiber: insoluble and soluble. Although different foods contain primarily one type of fiber or the other, most plant-based foods contain a mixture of both. It is important to include a variety of fiber sources in the diet.

Insoluble fiber absorbs water as it goes through the gastrointestinal tract, which increases stool bulk and promotes bowel regularity. Insoluble fiber sources include vegetables and gluten-free whole grains.

Soluble fiber dissolves in water to form a gel-like substance which helps lower cholesterol by binding with it and removing it from the body. Legumes and fruits are examples of soluble fiber sources.

How much fiber is needed and where to find it

The “Daily Value” (DV) for fiber is 28 grams per day. This is the amount the average consumer over age 4 should aim for, and is the value used as the standard on Nutrition Facts labels on food packages.

All plant based foods provide some fiber, but some foods are better sources than others.

TIPS FOR ADDING FIBER

Add Fiber Slowly
Increasing fiber intake too quickly can cause bloating, gas, and stomach pain. Add just one extra serving of a fiber-rich food per day for several days, then continue to increase gradually until you reach your goal.

Water
Without adequate fluids, it is possible to become constipated or have hard stools. Drink plenty of water as you increase fiber intake.

Exercise
Daily exercise - along with adequate fiber intake - helps the gastrointestinal tract work better. A daily walk is all it takes.

Legumes This category may be the best place to focus for highest fiber food sources. Legumes include beans (such as pinto, garbanzo and black beans, to name just a few), peas, and lentils.

- ½ cup of most types of beans: ~ 6-8 grams of fiber.*
- ½ cup lentils: ~ 4 grams fiber.

Fruits & Vegetables Include plenty of vegetables and fruits in your diet, to not only add fiber, but increase overall healthfulness.

- Apples, bananas, and oranges all provide about 3 grams fiber per piece of fruit. Most other fruits provide a little less per serving, but some provide more.
- Most cooked vegetables, like broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green beans or yams provide 2-3 grams fiber per half cup.

Gluten-Free Whole Grains and Flours Whole grains provide more fiber than refined versions. Use gluten-free whole grains as side dishes with meals, and try using whole grain gluten-free flours in baking. (Find tips for cooking gluten-free whole grains here <https://gluten.org/2019/10/17/whole-grains/>)

- ½ cup cooked teff: 3.5 grams fiber.
- ½ cup cooked quinoa or cornmeal: ~ 2.5 grams fiber.
- ½ cup cooked brown rice: 2 grams fiber

Seeds and Nuts Incorporating nuts and seeds into the diet is an easy way to increase fiber. Add pumpkin or sunflower seeds to salads, and have a small handful of nuts with a piece of fruit for a snack.

- ¼ cup pumpkin seeds: ~ 3 grams fiber
- 2 Tablespoons almonds: ~ 3 grams fiber

Ideas for adding fiber throughout the day. (Amounts of fiber provided are in parentheses after each item.)

- Breakfast: piece of fresh fruit (~ 3 g). Gluten-free whole grain waffle (~ 3 g) with almond butter (~ 2 g).
- Lunch: whole grain gluten-free wrap (~ 4 g) with protein of choice. 2 carrots (~ 4 g).
- Snacks: yogurt with gluten-free granola sprinkled on top (~ 2 g). 3 cups popcorn (~ 3 g).
- Dinner: 1 cup black beans (~ 15 g) with vegetables (~ 3 g) and quinoa (~ 3 g)

* The symbol “~” means “approximately.”

This educational bulletin has been produced by the Gluten Intolerance Group of North America, a registered 501(c)3 organization. Learn more about GIG at www.gluten.org.

GIG is on a mission to make life easier for everyone living gluten-free.

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