



An Apple a Day...

By Carrie Morgan

You've heard it a thousand and one times before, but why, exactly, does an apple a day keep the doctor away? Beside the obvious nutrient content and antioxidant power, apples are a great source of fiber. You don't have to be a fitness enthusiast to know that fiber is an essential element to building a healthy lifestyle. Aside from the well-known "bowel benefits", fiber also aids in reducing the risk of heart disease, facilitating weight reduction, and stabilizing blood glucose levels in athletes and diabetics alike. The challenge arises when we try to add more fiber to our diet, most thinking the best way is to eat more salads, when in fact, it would take 15-20 cups of lettuce to meet the daily-requirements of fiber content! Who's got time for that?

Adding more fiber to your foods is actually quite simple. Variety is key because different foods offer different types of fiber with different health benefits. There are two main types of fiber:

Insoluble fiber- Gives plants their structure and is found in wheat bran, whole grains, skins of fruits & vegetables, and dried beans. Insoluble means it does not dissolve in water and cannot be used as a food source for intestinal bacteria so it will not produce the gas byproduct that creates embarrassing & uncomfortable intestinal gas. Insoluble fiber sources absorb many more times their weight in water improving the movement of food through the bowels, consequently reducing disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, colon polyps, hemorrhoids and constipation.

Soluble fiber- Found in oatmeal, oat bran, fruits, barley, legumes and psyllium husk (Metamucil) and flax seed. This form of fiber is absorbed in water to form a gel that slows both stomach emptying and the absorption of sugars in the intestine. Because soluble fiber slows the absorption of sugar into the intestine, it may help in lowering glucose levels in diabetics and also reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, soluble fiber binds to cholesterol allowing it to be eliminated from the blood, lowering serum cholesterol levels 10-15% in those with elevated cholesterol levels. Not only is this fiber heart healthy, but it's also an excellent pre-exercise food, providing sustained release of energy

into the bloodstream that can therefore enhance your endurance training. Some sustaining pre-exercise snacks include oatmeal, hummus, and refried beans.

As if all those benefits aren't enough to persuade you to become a fiber junkie, here are some additional fiber fun facts for you to chew on. Fiber facilitates weight loss in two ways; First, higher density foods containing more water satisfy the stomach much earlier than fiber-depleted foods, contributing to a feeling of fullness for prolonged periods. In addition, higher fiber foods tend to be lower calorie and take longer to chew, making the likelihood of excessive calorie consumption improbable. Second, when fiber is digested it is converted into short-chain fatty acids, which in turn can be burned for fuel. The burning of fatty acids sends a signal to our fat cells telling them to release fat, which your body uses for fuel. Bye-bye fat, hello fiber!

So how much fiber is enough? A minimum of 25-35 grams per day from foods, not supplements, is recommended to achieve the healthful benefits mentioned above. The average American only consumes 10 grams of fiber per day- pretty sad considering that fiber sources are very inexpensive. If this is you, be sure to SLOWLY increase your fiber intake to the recommended levels by introducing high-fiber alternatives using the following tips. It's important to note that fiber can only be found in plant sources, not meats or dairy.

Tips to Make Fiber Your Friend:

1. Kick Start your Day- High fiber breakfast cereals boasting "bran", "whole wheat", and "whole grain" on ingredient labels can start your day with almost half the recommended daily requirements for fiber.
High fiber cereals like Fiber One, All Bran, and Kashi Go Lean = 10-14g fiber
2. Berry Good- Raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries have twice the amount of fiber as many other fruit selections.
½ Cup fresh raspberries = 4g fiber
3. Whole In One- Munch on the whole piece of fruit, including the skin, vs. a glass of juice. You'll get all the nutrients and more than twice as much fiber with a fraction of the calories from the liquid counterpart.
1 medium apple with skin = 4g fiber
4. Go Golden Brown- Switch from nutritionally void white varieties of rice, bread and pastas by substituting to the tastier, fiber-packed versions of brown rice, whole grain bread, and whole-wheat pasta. Note: when scanning for a good bread choice, the first ingredient should list "whole wheat" or another "whole" grain and should provide at least 2g fiber per serving.
1 Cup Brown Rice = 3g fiber
5. Beans Baby- Typical side dishes can be replaced with high-fiber peas and legumes such as kidney, pinto, and black-eyed peas, served by themselves or even as a tasty soup.
½ Cup canned kidney beans = 8g fiber

6. Top It All Off- Crunchy bran cereals make the perfect topper for your favorite foods like salads, yogurt, and casseroles or try substituting whole oats to recipes calling for bread crumbs like meatloaf, muffins and crusted baked chicken.

½ Cup Oats (uncooked) = 4g fiber

7. Water- As you up your fiber intake, your body will require more water to process the fiber.

You should be drinking half your body weight in ounces of water per day.

Example: weight = 150lbs. = 75oz. water