

## Can Fiber Boost My Intestinal Health And Wellness?

We have been told that we must eat a certain amount of fiber with our meals because it is 'good for us'. Most of us have been led to believe that this is because fiber promotes bowel motions and prevents us from suffering from constipation. It is also good for our digestive system. But how true is this, and just what are the real benefits of fiber in our diet?

First of what, what is fiber? Sure, we know there must be fiber in food such as cabbage, beans and celery because we can see it. But is all fiber actually fibrous? Of course not, so let's first have a close look at what dietary fiber actually is.

Fiber is composed of these parts of a plant that are broken down by the action of enzymes in our digestive juices in the upper parts of our intestinal tract. Some fiber can be digested by the bacteria in our lower intestine, and some is not. So where does fiber come from? By that definition, fiber can be any part of your food, not only the stringy bits, and by definition are of vegetable origin.

Water insoluble fibers increase fecal bulk. That's the stringy stuff in celery and string beans. It is also contained in cellulose materials, lignin, wheat bran, whole grains and most vegetables. These have the effect of increasing the efficiency of the peristaltic movement of the intestine on the passage of chyme (the creamy fluid that exits the stomach into the duodenum) through your system.

The liquid and nutrients are progressively removed, and the fiber maintains the bulk needed for peristalsis to work properly. Peristalsis is the rhythmic movement of the intestine that forces your food right from your stomach to your rectum. It is also the basis of some forms of industrial pump that operate on the same principle. Without fiber this pump would be inefficient.

Soluble fiber includes the gum and pectin that are obtained from plant cells. They swell up the chyme, and slow down its rate of travel through the gastrointestinal system, although they have no effect on fecal bulk. Specific examples are oat bran, fruit and most vegetables (all plants contain both). A peach, for example, consists of a skin which is insoluble fiber, and the juicy pulp beneath it which is predominantly soluble fiber.

Although a distinction is made between dietary and crude fiber, they both have their part to play. The term 'fiber' is a wide one and it cannot be said that fiber as a whole imparts a specific health benefit. The benefits of fiber are a combination of those imparted by the full range of types of fiber and their sources that are contained in the human diet, both crude and dietary, soluble and insoluble.

So what specifically are these benefits, other than just the generalization that they are 'good for your intestinal health'? As you likely know, it is the fiber in your diet that binds your feces together into a solid, rather than leaving it as a mobile liquid. Although around 75% of feces are liquid, the bulk of the rest is fiber, bacteria and undigested food.

Since insoluble fiber makes feces bulkier and softer it can help treat constipation, where the stool has an excess of solid content. Any substance that absorbs water and swells can help with this condition. The same is true of hemorrhoids and a condition of the wall of the intestine known as diverticulosis. Once the inflammation has subsided, a high soluble fiber diet can help prevent a recurrence.

If you want to lose weight, a fiber diet can make you feel full without the calories, since fiber is calorie-free. There is also the fact that high fiber foods have to be chewed longer before they can be swallowed, and so you are liable to eat less in the same time. However, if you are determined, all that means is that you will have to lunch longer to get the same weight gain!

There is little doubt that a fiber-rich diet contributes significantly to intestinal health, and that if the correct amount of fiber is not taken then problems such as constipation, diarrhea, diverticulosis and a lack of absorption of nutrients will occur. The peristaltic pumping motion of the whole gastrointestinal tract, from the top of the throat to the anus, is dependent on solids rather than liquids. While a semi-liquid fecal consistency will pass through your body, it will take the bulk of the nutrition extracted from your food with it. It is fiber that is needed to bulk it up and to enable the liquid to be extracted through the intestinal wall and the fibrous solid to pass on through the colon to the anus.

There are other benefits of a diet high in fiber, though they generally depend on the type of fiber. Take cholesterol, for example. High LDL blood cholesterol levels are associated with atherosclerosis, and the consequent risk of heart disease and strokes, due to the oxidation of the LDL by free radicals. When the HDL lipids carry cholesterol back to the liver, it is destroyed by the action of bile acids. Since water soluble fiber binds bile acids, it figures that some types of fiber can promote the excretion of cholesterol from the body. The fiber most effective in achieving this comes from rolled oats and also pectin.

It has also been claimed that dietary fiber might be effective in preventing cancer of the colon. The theory is that bowel cancer is caused by toxins in

the feces and if the fecal matter is expelled from the body quickly, the toxins will have less time to act. Fiber promotes the expulsion of the contents of the colon. This has not been confirmed, however.

What has been confirmed is that your bowel can collect mucoid plaque that sticks to mainly your colon, and is an ideal environment for parasites and yeast infections. The National Fiber Council has stated that most people do not eat enough fiber, and the average requirement is 38g a day for men and 25g a day for women.

So eat your fiber, because fiber can boost your intestinal health and wellness.

## About the Author

More information on dietary [fiber](#) is available at VitaNet &reg;, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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