

What is Fiber Exactly?

Fiber often has been called roughage, as it technically is a food component that is undigested and processed through the gastrointestinal tract. Since it readily absorbs water, it helps to add to the bulk that is required in order to form a good bowel movement. Fiber is often described as a complex carbohydrate, which consists of the polysaccharide and lignin substance that often gives structure to the cell of a plant and is the portion of plant food that is not digested.

Fiber which is insoluble has the capability of passing through the intestines intact and unchanged. Unlike fats, carbohydrates, and proteins, fiber does not give the body nutrients or fuel for energy, and has no caloric value. Dietary fiber can only be found in plant components including vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Primarily, there are only two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble, with some foods containing both types.

Soluble fiber is eventually digested in the large intestine, causing it to have limited bulking power. Soluble fibers dissolve in water and have often been linked to helping prevent blood sugar highs and lows, helping to lower blood cholesterol, lowering the risk of heart disease, helping to control high blood pressure, and encouraging friendly bacteria growth. Soluble fiber can be found in pectin, lignin, gums, mucilages, and other sources such as psyllium, beans, apples, pears, and oat bran.

Soluble fiber doesn't usually seem like fiber. It is digestible and, when broken down, it creates a gel as it absorbs water in the intestinal tract. It does not bulk the stool to the extent of insoluble fiber, but it does slow down the rate at which food is digested. Soluble fiber is found in vegetables, particularly onions, bulbs, leeks, and asparagus, and also fruits, including dried varieties.

Insoluble fiber remains undigested for the most part and promotes a faster stool transit time. Insoluble fiber can keep the bowel clean and operative and also help to bind dangerous toxins and hormones in order to promote better excretion. Insoluble fiber also fosters regularity in the body, contributes to better digestion, prevents constipation, and helps to lower the risk of bowel disease.

Insoluble fiber is primarily composed of cellulose and hemicellulose. Cellulose is a non-digestible form of fiber, found in outer portions of vegetables and fruits. Bran or seed covering of whole grains is another type of insoluble fiber. Hemicellulose fibers remain unchanged and absorb water as they travel the digestive tract. They increase stool bulk and transit time, preventing constipation and conditions like hemorrhoids. Stalks, stems, peels, and fruit and vegetable skins are all made up of insoluble fiber. However, the insoluble fiber content of fruits is actually found in its flesh and stringy membranes, rather than its peelings.

The average person needs a good variety of foods that contribute to at least 35 grams of dietary fiber in our diet daily. Most foods contain both types of fiber, but the ones that are most fiber rich are not usually the ones that we commonly eat. Whole grain cereal, raw fruits and vegetables, split peas, beans, lentils, millet, and barley are the best sources of fiber. Unfortunately, statistics have shown that most of us only get 9 grams of fiber each day, if we are lucky.

Finally, fiber has the ability to increase fecal bulk by retaining water, decrease stool transit time, keep blood sugar levels more stable, lower blood serum and liver cholesterol, help prevent weight gain by slowing the rate of digestion and absorption and controlling hunger, expediting the removal of dangerous toxins, binding with bile salts to help decrease the risk of gallbladder disease and certain types of cancer, and creating the presence of healthier intestinal bacteria.

About the Author

More information on [fiber for bowel health](#) is available at VitaNet ®, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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