

Total Nutrition

Don't Give Up on Fiber

(NAPS)—For nearly 30 years, studies have associated a diet high in fiber with the reduced risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Researchers continue to study fiber and its usefulness in maintaining good health. Recent media attention surrounding two recent studies, however, may have left people with a mistaken impression about fiber. The results of these studies should be viewed cautiously, since they in no way suggest that people should forget about the value of fiber. In fact, most health experts, including the studies' lead investigators, emphasize that people should continue to eat a low-fat, fiber-rich diet high in fruits, vegetables, grains and beans to improve overall health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. The bottom line? Fiber has many virtues.

Intestinal health—Fiber stimulates the muscles in your intestine, which helps keep them toned and functioning smoothly. This action helps prevent diverticulosis—a disease that weakens the walls of the intestine and causes them to bulge out and potentially become irritated. And, of course, fiber reduces the risk of constipation and hemorrhoids.

Heart health—When combined with a low-fat diet, fiber can help lower cholesterol in the blood by reducing how much of it is absorbed by the body. Some experts believe dietary fiber binds with cholesterol, making it less absorbable. The precise mechanism responsible for the cholesterol-lowering effect of soluble fiber is unclear.

Eating a high-fiber diet also can help reduce the amount of fat you eat. A recent study found that men, who ate two bowls of high-fiber cereal every day for 12 weeks without altering their diets in any other way, lowered the amount of fat they normally ate by 10 percent.

Diabetes benefits—A fiber-rich diet may help control blood-sugar levels. The fiber found in fruits, vegetables, beans (legumes) and certain grains such as oats and barley may slow the absorption of sugar into the blood. The

Experts recommend eating 25 to 30 grams of fiber every day.	
Food	FIBER (grams)
Legumes— $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	5-8
Whole-grain cereals—1 cup	2-8
Whole grain bread—1 slice	2
Popcorn—2 cups	
Brown rice— $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	
Fruits—1 medium sized whole fruit or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cut up	2-4
Vegetables— $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	2-4
Nuts— $\frac{1}{4}$ cup	2 

result is a more even rise in blood sugar after a meal—good news for people with diabetes who may otherwise need to take medication to keep their blood-sugar levels under control. A small study done last year found that participants who ate 50 grams of fiber (including 13 servings of fruits, vegetables, grains and beans) lowered their blood sugar levels by 10 percent. They also reduced their cholesterol, which helps lower the risk for heart disease.

Weight control benefits—Fiber-rich foods are filling and tend to contain fewer calories than high-fat, high-sugar foods. Therefore, eating a high-fiber diet usually leaves little room for more calorie-rich foods.

Because a high-fiber diet helps keep blood-sugar levels in line, it may also reduce food cravings. Researchers in Australia found that when study participants ate a high-fiber diet, they ate fewer calories yet reported feeling more satisfied following their meals than when they ate high-fat, fiber-poor cakes, rolls and candies.

A Great Start Toward Total Nutrition—There is still a case for fiber and a lower risk of colon cancer. Hundreds of studies have supported the theory, but regardless of its affect on colon cancer, fiber still has many other perks. Choose five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day and three or more servings of whole-grain foods.

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