

Nutrition News And Notes

Focus On Fiber To Help Lower Your Cholesterol[Ⓢ]

(NAPSA)—An easy way to lower or maintain your cholesterol may be to focus on fiber—and there are plenty of tasty ways to incorporate healthy fiber into your diet.

Fiber Facts

Dietary fiber, found in plant foods, is generally defined as any part of a plant not digested by human enzymes secreted into the small intestine. Fiber varies widely in its chemical makeup, but it can be broadly classified into two types: soluble fiber, which dissolves in water, and insoluble fiber, which does not dissolve in water.

“Most fruits, vegetables and grains have both soluble and insoluble fiber,” says Lynne Ausman, DSc, R.D., nutrition professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. “Both types of fiber benefit the body, but soluble fiber is more closely associated with lowering cholesterol.”

Good sources of soluble fiber include:

- oats
- nuts and seeds
- beans and peas
- fruits, especially those with a gel-like pulp (berries, peaches, plums, etc.).

“Much of the cholesterol in our bodies is made by the body itself, but we add to it through foods we eat,” says Ausman. “Since chole-

sterol usually increases with age, eating fiber-rich foods can help lower or maintain cholesterol by binding to cholesterol in the intestines and flushing it from the body. In addition to eating a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, fiber is important for promoting healthy cholesterol levels.”

Ausman notes that most people are only eating about half the fiber they need each day. “Aim to consume about 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories consumed,” she suggests. You can also follow the guidelines from the Institute of Medicine:

Women:

Under 50: 25 grams per day

Over 50: 21 grams per day

Men:

Under 50: 38 grams per day

Over 50: 30 grams per day

Beans typically have the most fiber, as evidenced by the impressive 19 grams of fiber in a cup of navy beans. One cup of raspberries has about eight grams of fiber; instant oatmeal about four; and one ounce of almonds has around three.

Still curious about how much fiber your favorite foods have?

“Check nutrition labels to learn how many grams of fiber you are consuming,” says Ausman. “You can also use online programs to find fiber content of foods without labels.”

Fill Up On Fiber

Increase your fiber intake slowly. “Too much fiber too quickly may cause cramping, gas or bloating,” cautions Ausman. “Drink plenty of water and other beverages. Fiber absorbs water, and without enough fluids, may cause constipation.”

Ausman also stresses that it is essential to discuss cholesterol and related dietary changes with a doctor, as cholesterol is not only influenced by diet, but also by genetics.

Help keep your cholesterol in check by trying some of these easy and tasty fiber-filled foods:

- Eat oatmeal or oat cereal for breakfast. Top with berries or eat a side of fruit.
- Make a strawberry-banana smoothie with whole fruit and low-fat milk or 100 percent fruit juice.
- Spread peanut butter on apple slices.
- Toss walnuts, peanuts or sunflower seeds with raisins, dried apricots or plums for energy on the go.
- Snack on sliced fruit or veggies with a low-fat dip, such as yogurt or Italian dressing.
- Complement sandwiches with broth-based vegetable soups containing beans or peas.
- Top salads with kidney beans, chickpeas, slivered almonds or sesame seeds.