

Stay Fit with Fiber

By Dr. Lindsey Duncan, N.D., C.N.

Everyone eats fiber, but few people truly understand the critical importance of fiber to their bodies, well-being, and longevity. As a naturopathic doctor, certified nutritionist, and practicing in a nutrition clinic for the past 20 plus years, it has become very clear to me that fiber is one of the most important elements that we can put into our body. I equate the importance of fiber on the same level as quality food and water. As a protégé of the world-renowned Dr. Bernard Jensen, I became very bowel minded. Meaning, Dr. Jensen and I place a lot of importance on intestinal and bowel health; by doing this we go to the core of many health issues.

Two Kinds of Fiber

It is important to understand that there are two kinds of fiber – soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber dissolves in water. This type of fiber helps to slow the absorption of glucose from the intestines into the blood stream, and therefore, improves the blood sugar balance as well as helping to lower cholesterol. Some examples would be oat bran, dried beans or peas.

Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water. It helps to bulk up the stool and allows for more efficient bowel movements. Insoluble fiber also helps to bind excess fats and toxins in the digestive tract so they become excreted in our bowels or stool. Research has shown that populations that consume larger quantities of fiber have less risk of developing colon cancer and other cancers as well.

Recommended Amount

The average American does not get enough fiber. Statistics and research shows that the average American gets 10 to 15 grams of fiber daily. Knowledgeable researchers recommend a minimum of 25 grams daily. I believe the U.S. Surgeon General is now finally recommending 25–30 grams daily. My clinical practice shows 40 grams daily to be most effective.

The Benefits of Fiber

Daily doses of good, high quality fiber that has been formulated properly has been clinically proven to be beneficial in the following conditions:

- Lowers the risk of colon cancer
- Assists in maintaining the beneficial bacteria balance in the bowels
- Speeds up the elimination of waste out of the bowel
- Absorbs toxins in the bowel and removes them from the body
- Softens stools, reducing constipation
- Reduces cholesterol
- Balances blood sugar levels

- Assists in weight loss

In my personal experience, I have used a specific blend of fiber that helps to create a sense of fullness without containing empty calories. When this fiber is taken about 20 to 30 minutes before eating, fullness occurs, and reducing one's appetite and the quantity of food eaten is reduced up to 75%. Research at the University of California at Davis shows that eating fiber releases hormones that make you feel satiated (American Journal Clinical Nutrition, Sept. 2002; 76: 659).

If the fiber product you take is based in cold milled flaxseed and cold milled hemp seed fiber, it is proven to be beneficial for the heart and entire cardiovascular system. A ten-year study of 68,000 women reported in The Journal of the American Medical Association (6/2/99) demonstrated that fiber, particularly the fiber found in cereal grains, lowered heart disease risk.

My Favorite Fibers

My favorite fiber sources, along with other ingredients that should be included when taking fiber or a fiber supplement are listed below:

- 100 % organic cold milled flaxseed fiber – a great source of lignans and very beneficial to the cardiovascular system
 - 100 % organic raw cold milled hemp seed fiber – a wonderful source of protein, amino acid and properly balanced essential fatty acids; also very beneficial to the cardiovascular system
 - Rice bran – a good source of tocotrienols and phytosterols
 - Noni Fruit Fiber – has excellent results with candida, fungal bacteria, yeast and viral fighting capabilities
 - Noni leaf powder
 - Oat Fiber
 - Carrot Fiber
 - Beet Fiber
 - Guar gum
- } great sources of gentle fiber
- Slippery Elm Bark – soothing to the intestinal system
 - Cat's Claw – healing to the intestinal system especially IBS (irritable bowel syndrome)
 - Nopal – a great cactus fiber
 - Cumin – a heat generating spice
 - Boldo – an herb that's healing to the intestinal system
 - FOS – assists in increasing good bacteria in the body
 - Ginger Root – generates heat in the digestive system
 - Stevia Leaf extract – helps blood sugar and improves the taste
 - Gymnema Sylvestre – removes sugar from our blood stream and body
 - Bitter melon fruit extract – beneficial to blood sugar
 - Lactospore (lactobacillus sporogenes) – clinically proven beneficial bacteria
 - Chromium and Copper – both aid in balancing the blood sugar

Flaxseed – Beneficial but Be Aware!

Flaxseeds contain a good balance of both soluble and insoluble fiber. Flaxseeds bulk up the stool and because of the natural oils, help to sooth the colon.

The following four clinical studies suggest the great benefits of flaxseed fiber:

1. Atherosclerosis 2004 Apr., 173(2): 2223-9 (reports flaxseed helps to reduce cholesterol)
2. Nutrition Journal 2004 Oct. 20, 3(1): 19 (reports it may lower the risk of several types of cancer)
3. Duke University Medical Center report in July issue of Urology (states a low-fat diet supplemented with flaxseed may help reduce the risk of prostate cancer)
4. American Institute for Cancer Research Newsletter 59, Winter 1998 (reports Flaxseed shows promise against breast cancer)

However, be aware that many fiber products on the market that contain flaxseed fiber can be rancid because the seeds contain fat and oil. High temperature of heat will change the molecular structure of the oils and cause them to become rancid. It is important to make sure your flaxseed fiber has been cold processed, has not become rancid, and is from a high quality organic source.

Hempseed

The second fiber I am particularly fond of is hemp seed fiber. The hemp seed fiber is especially beneficial because it is a good source of fat and is extremely high in fiber (about 70%). It is probably one of the highest sources of protein and amino acids. Comparatively speaking it is higher in protein than milk, tofu, almonds, chicken, cheese, peanuts, fish, beef and soybeans. Hemp protein powder or fiber is extremely beneficial and has the proper ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 fatty acids.

Foods High in Fiber

Let me give you a list of foods that are high in fiber. Many people think that fruit is high in fiber when in fact vegetables have much more fiber than fruit.

	Serving	Soluble (in grams)	Insoluble (in grams)	Total (in grams)
Honeydew, Melon	½ cup	0.1	0.4	0.5
Grapefruit	½	0.1	0.3	0.4
Artichoke	1 med	3.5	2.9	6.4
Broccoli	½ cup	1.6	1.0	2.6
Brussels sprouts	½ cup	0.4	2.8	3.2
Almonds, roasted	22 whole	0.1	2.4	2.5
Peanut	30 to 40	0.1	1.9	2.0

Lentils, dry, cooked	½ cup	0.1	2.8	2.9
Peas (green)	½ cup	0.3	2.8	3.1

If you take a good fiber supplement that has cold milled flaxseed, with cold milled hempseed fiber, rice bran fiber, noni fruit and noni leaf fiber and some of the ingredients we were talking about earlier, in one serving you will get 5 grams of dietary fiber. If you take two servings of fiber a day then you are well over 10 grams for the day!

Potential Problems

When taking extra fiber it is critical that you drink plenty of water. Increasing fiber without increasing fluid can cause a little clogging, constipation, or cause some blockages in the intestinal tract.

Not all fiber supplements are formulated properly. When not formulated or balanced correctly, they can produce gas and bloating, as well as have a harsh, drying, and depleting effect on the body. I am not fond of psyllium husks or psyllium seed for this very reason. Psyllium fiber absorbs so much liquid that it can dry the body out, depleting electrolytes, essential fatty acids, and fluids. In my clinic, I've seen this cause dry, cracking skin, split fingernails, dry hair and depletion of important nutrients. The reason this happens is that the psyllium fibers swell up and become like concrete inside the human body.

In Summary

There are so many important components in choosing a fiber supplement. When taking a fiber product, one must take into consideration a proper ratio of fiber and fat making sure the fiber supplement is not just a fiber supplement, but is good for cleansing, purification, digestion, the heart, the circulatory system, cardiovascular system, blood sugar, and good food for the brain. Fiber is ideal for balancing and replenishing the positive and beneficial intestinal flora that so many of us are missing. Ideally, it should be a rich source of soluble and insoluble fiber. Lastly, be sure to choose a product that dissolves well so that it doesn't dry out the body or cause binding in the intestines.

Over the past fifteen years fiber has truly become a superstar in the natural health world. Since fiber has such a positive effect on the digestive and eliminative system, it is one of the most important supplements that can be taken on a daily basis.