

# bulk up on with **FIBER!** BENEFITS

After oat bran made fiber big news in the late 1980's, concerns about dietary fat took fiber's place in the headlines. Now whole grains and fiber are regaining their place in the spotlight, and with good reason! Nutritionists recommend we get 25 to 38 grams of fiber every day, but most Americans get only about half that much.

The good news? Most of us already enjoy eating good sources of fiber like grain foods, fruits, and vegetables. However, we might not know exactly what dietary fiber is, why we need it, where we can get it, and other important fiber-related information. Answer these commonly asked questions about fiber to find out.

## **Q. *What is fiber?***

**A.** Found in grain foods such as breads, cereal or pasta and in fruits and vegetables, fiber is the part of plant foods that is indigestible. Although not an energy source for humans, fiber is an important dietary aid that helps "keep us regular" and may prevent disease.

Resistant starch also escapes digestion in the small intestine. RS is found in potatoes, legumes, pasta and other grain-based foods.

## **Q. *Why do we need fiber?***

**A.** **Insoluble fiber**, found in wheat bran and whole grains, passes through the digestive system quickly. This promotes regularity and helps reduce the risk of colon irregularities or diverticulosis, a type of colon disease. Research shows foods containing insoluble fiber may also help reduce the risk of colon and breast cancer when part of a low-fat diet.

**Soluble fiber** is found in oats, barley, beans, some fruits and vegetables, white bread, rolls, bagels, tortillas and pasta. Studies indicate foods containing soluble fiber may help decrease cholesterol levels, help reduce the risk of heart disease and help control blood sugar levels in people with diabetes.

**Resistant starch** is used as fuel for health-promoting bacteria living in the large intestine. In this way RS acts as a prebiotic benefiting bowel health. Resistant starch also helps increase insulin sensitivity and lower glycemic response, therefore helping maintain healthy blood sugar levels.

## **Q. *How much fiber do we need?***

**A.** The American Dietetic Association recommends we get 25-38 grams of fiber each day. The average American gets only 12 grams a day. By getting enough fruits, vegetables, legumes and grain foods, which are good sources of fiber, we can easily increase our fiber intake.

## **Q. *What foods are good sources of fiber?***

**A.** Foods high in fiber include whole wheat bread, rye bread, whole grain cereal, beans, fruits and vegetables. When combined with

your favorite low-fat sauces, toppings, salads and side dishes, fiber-containing foods add convenience and flavor to your menu.

By selecting a variety of high-fiber foods, you can keep meals interesting and balanced. For example, one-half cup of barley has nearly seven grams of fiber; one wheat-bran muffin has almost two grams of fiber; and one-half cup of spaghetti has about one gram. A large apple with peel provides more than four grams of fiber and one-half cup of fresh corn has three grams. If you plan meals with plenty of fruits, vegetables and grains, it's easy to get your 25 to 38 grams of fiber each day.

## **Q. *Which types of grain foods are the best fiber sources?***

**A.** From pasta to pita, bagels to bulgur and cereal to crackers, all grain foods contribute important vitamins, minerals and fiber to a healthful diet. In general, foods made from enriched flour (such as white bread and rolls) contain soluble fiber, while whole grain foods offer insoluble fiber. Both types of fiber are important for good health. To be sure you get enough of both, make at least three of your daily grain foods whole grain products and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.

## **Q. *How do I get started?***

**A.** The best way to increase your fiber intake is to gradually increase the amount of fiber-rich foods eaten each day. This will help prevent the bloating and diarrhea sometimes associated with a rapid influx of dietary fiber. You'll get the dietary fiber you need without overdoing it. It's also important to get plenty of fluids as fiber intake is increased.

## **Q. *How can I tell how much fiber is in a specific food?***

**A.** By reading the Nutrition Facts food label, you can easily find the amount of fiber in a specific food. The label shows nutrients and calories contained in foods based on serving size. The amount of dietary fiber is listed under the total carbohydrate section. Foods that are a good source of fiber have at least 2 to 3 grams of fiber per serving. Foods that are especially high in fiber have 5 grams or more.