Intermountain® Healthcare

High-Fiber Eating Plan

Most people know it's a good idea to eat fruits and vegetables. The dietary fiber in these foods can improve almost anyone's health. For some people, though, fiber is particularly important. If you have — or are at risk for — certain medical conditions, a high-fiber eating plan can make a real difference in your health.

What is dietary fiber?

Dietary fiber is the part of foods your body can't digest. Other parts of your food, such as fats, proteins, and carbohydrates, are broken down and absorbed. Fiber passes through your body mostly unchanged. It doesn't provide calories or vitamins. But it does provide a lot of health benefits.

Fiber falls into two categories:

- **Soluble fiber** dissolves in water, and is found in oats, peas, beans, barley, and many fruits. It helps lower blood cholesterol and blood glucose.
- **Insoluble fiber** does not dissolve in water and is found in whole-grain products, bran, nuts, and many vegetables. It absorbs water in your intestinal tract and helps to soften stools. This moves food more quickly through your intestinal tract.

All plant foods contain both types of fiber, but most have more of one type than the other. For the most benefit, eat a wide variety of high-fiber foods.

What are the benefits?

A high-fiber eating plan can help in these ways:

- **It can decrease constipation and other digestive problems.** Fiber helps to soften your stool and move food through your body more quickly. This puts less pressure on your colon and decreases your risk of digestive conditions such as hemorrhoids, irritable bowel syndrome, and diverticulosis.
- **It can lower blood cholesterol.** Soluble fiber limits the amount of cholesterol your body can absorb. Especially if you already have high cholesterol, fiber can lower your levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol. And lowering your cholesterol can reduce your risk of heart disease.
- **It can help manage diabetes.** Fiber can slow the rate at which your body absorbs sugar. This can reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. For people with diabetes, fiber can improve blood glucose levels.
- **It can help you watch your weight.** High-fiber foods can make you feel more full for a longer time. They also tend to have fewer calories for the same amount of food.

It is uncertain whether a high-fiber eating plan reduces colorectal cancer. If you're concerned about colorectal cancer, it's best to get screened for it regularly. People over age 50 should have a colonoscopy every 5 to 10 years.

How much fiber do I need to eat — and how do I get it?

A high-fiber eating plan should provide 25 to 35 grams of fiber a day. Once you learn a few tricks, you'll see that this can be easy, and even enjoyable. In general, aim for aim for 2½ cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit, and 3 servings of whole grains each day. To fit them in, consider all your meals and snacks.

Breakfast is a great time to start out with a healthy amount of fiber.

- Start your day with a cereal that's a good source of fiber. Top it off with fresh or dried fruit and nuts.
- Sprinkle wheat germ, wheat bran, or oat bran on cereal or yogurt.
- Add bran to muffins and before baking.

At **lunch time**, increase the fiber in foods you might be already eating:

- When appropriate, eat fresh fruits and vegetables with the skin on.
- Make your sandwich on whole-grain bread.
- Choose soups that have beans as a main ingredient.
- Snack on fresh or dried fruit, raw vegetables, nuts, or whole grain crackers.

For **dinner**, include high-fiber side dishes:

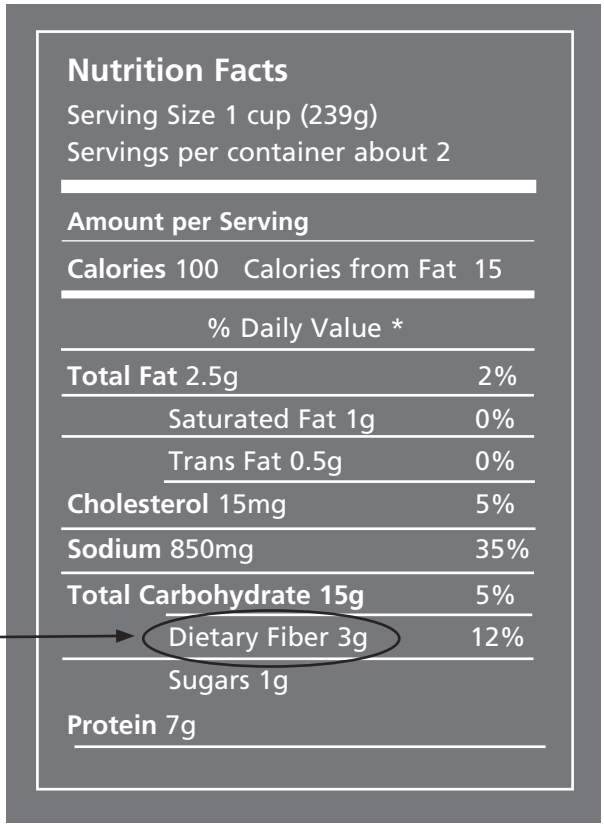
- Choose whole-grain breads, pasta, and rice most of the time.
- Add beans, peas, sunflower seeds, or nuts to your salad.
- Add unprocessed bran to meatballs or meatloaf before cooking.

How much fiber is in my food?

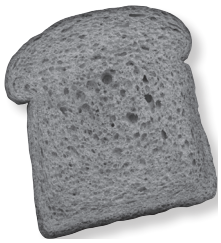
The **labels** on many food products make claims about how much fiber is in the food. These labels aren't allowed to claim just anything, though. Each claim has a specific meaning.

- **"High fiber"** or **"rich in fiber"** means the food must contain at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.
- **"Good source of fiber"** or **"contains fiber"** means the food must contain 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber.
- **"More fiber"** or **"added fiber"** means the food must have at least 2.5 grams more fiber than the regular product.

The **Nutrition Facts food label** also tells you how much fiber is in your food. The amount listed is the amount in each serving of the food. Try to eat foods that have 3 or more grams of fiber per serving.



This table lists foods that are all good choices for a high-fiber eating plan.

Food	Fiber content	
Beans		
• Kidney beans, cooked, ½ cup	8 grams	
• Split peas, cooked, ½ cup	8 grams	
• Lentils, cooked, ½ cup	8 grams	
• Pinto beans, cooked, ½ cup	8 grams	
• Black beans, cooked, ½ cup	7 grams	
Grains		
• 100% Bran cereal, ½ cup	9 grams	
• Rye crackers, 2	5 grams	
• Whole-wheat English muffin, 1	4 grams	
• Whole-wheat pasta, 1 cup	6 grams	
• Shredded wheat cereal, ½ cup	3 grams	
Fruits		
• Pear, raw, 1	4 grams	
• Raspberries, raw, ½ cup	4 grams	
• Apple with skin, raw	3 grams	
• Banana	3 grams	
• Orange	3 grams	
Vegetables		
• Sweet potato, baked, with skin	5 grams	
• Green peas, ½ cup	4 grams	
• Potato, baked, with skin	4 grams	
• Spinach, frozen, cooked, ½ cup	4 grams	
• Broccoli, cooked, ½ cup	3 grams	
Nuts and seeds		
• Popcorn, air popped, 3 cups	4 grams	
• Almonds, 1 ounce	3 grams	
• Peanuts, dry roasted, ¼ cup	2 grams	

What else should I know about my high-fiber eating plan?

Increase the amount of fiber in your diet gradually.

When you start to eat more fiber, your body needs some time to adjust. If you get too much fiber too soon, you may feel some gas and bloating. So start slowly, adding a little more fiber each day.

Drink at least 8 cups of water a day.

Fiber absorbs a lot of water as it moves through your colon. If you don't drink enough water, you may get constipated.

Use fiber supplements if recommended.

It's usually best to get fiber from the foods you eat. But if you're not able to get enough fiber through food alone, ask your doctor or dietitian if fiber supplements are a good choice for you.

Who can answer questions about this plan?

Your dietitian can answer questions about this eating plan. Questions about medications or symptoms should go to your doctor.

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

To locate a registered dietitian (RD) at Intermountain, go to **intermountainhealthcare.org/RD.**

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