

THE FIBRE FACTOR

By Susan Bowerman

More than 100 years ago, someone figured out how to separate the bran from grains of wheat, leaving only the starchy interior to be ground into flour. From this discovery, an amazing new product – white bread – was born. But the introduction of refined flour products certainly contributed to the slow decline in dietary fibre intake.

It has been estimated that our hunter-gatherer ancestors – who foraged for food for hours every day – ate about 5.5 kilograms of plant foods a day and about 100 grams of fibre. If we did that, we'd spend a good part of our day just eating. But the average person falls far short of meeting the fibre recommendation of 25 to 30 grams a day. In fact, most of us only eat about 15 grams. Fibre is the structural portion of a plant, and so it is found in whole fruits, vegetables, beans and grains (like corn and brown rice); there is no fibre in meats, fish or poultry. Different types of fibres have different effects on the body, and it's important to get plenty of fibre from a variety of sources.

Water-soluble fibres are found in the highest concentration in apples, oranges, carrots, potatoes, oats, barley and beans. These types of fibre delay the time it takes for food to pass through the system, and so they provide a feeling of fullness. They also slow the absorption of glucose (sugar) from the bloodstream and so they help to keep blood-sugar levels more even throughout the day. This type of fibre is also helpful in lowering blood cholesterol levels, which is why oats and oat bran have been popular for heart health.

Water-insoluble fibres are found in the highest concentrations in vegetables, wheat bran, corn bran, rice bran and most other whole grains. These fibres speed up the transfer of food through the intestines and also trap water, so they are particularly good in helping to minimise constipation.

The health benefits of a high-fibre diet are numerous. Most people are aware that fibre maintains normal bowel function. For those wanting to lose weight, a high-fibre diet is a great way to go. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains have fewer calories “per bite” than do foods that have a lot of fat and sugar. Also, the fibres keep food in the stomach longer and absorb water, so they provide the sensation of fullness.

Can you get too much? Adding too much fibre to the diet in a short period of time might lead to abdominal discomfort and gas, so if your diet is usually low in fibre, increase the amount slowly over a few weeks to give your system time to adjust. Also, drink plenty of liquid to allow the fibre to soften and swell. And make sure to eat a variety of fibre sources to reap all the health benefits that high-fibre foods provide.

SECTION FIVE: Week 8: Fibre

Tips for Increasing Fibre Intake

- Eat whole fruits with skin more often than drinking fruit juices.
- Use whole fruit as a dessert.
- Eat a variety of whole vegetables—cooked and raw—and eat them freely.
- Use wholegrain cereals, oatmeal and bran cereals more often than refined cereals, like Coco Pops or corn-flakes.
- Use 100% whole-grain breads, waffles, rolls, English muffins and crackers instead of those made with white flour.
- Try wholegrain pasta.
- Use corn tortillas rather than flour.
- Use brown rice, wild rice, millet, barley and cracked wheat as alternatives to white rice.
- Add beans to main-dish soups, stews, chili or salads.
- Add wheat bran or oat bran to meatloaf or meatballs.
- For snacks, use whole-grain pretzels, popcorn or low-fat bran muffins as alternatives to cakes, cookies and chips.
- If you have trouble meeting your fibre intake, you can use fibre supplements. But remember that fibre supplements don't replace the healthy fruits, vegetables and whole grains that you should be consuming.

FIBRE CONTENT OF SOME HIGH-FIBRE FOODS

FOOD ITEM	PORTION	CALORIES	FIBRE (GRAMS)
Blackberries	1 cup	75	8
Blueberries	1 cup	110	5
Orange	1 large	85	4
Red apple	1 medium	100	4
Red pear	1 medium	100	4
Strawberries	1 cup, sliced	50	4
Broccoli, cooked	1 cup	45	5
Carrots, cooked	1 cup	70	5
Spinach, cooked	1 cup	40	4
Winter squash, baked	1 cup	70	7
Cooked beans	½ cup, cooked	115-140	5-7
Lentils	½ cup, cooked	115	8
High-fibre bran cereal	⅔ cup	90-120	15-18
Oatmeal	1 cup, cooked	130	4
Rye crackers	3 crackers	75	5

*nutritional values are approximate and may vary depending what brand and products you use.

EAT YOUR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

By Luigi Gratton, M.P.H.

When our mothers told us, “Eat your fruits and vegetables,” they were right. They are an essential part of our diet, providing a wide range of vitamins and minerals that serve an array of important functions in the body. Many people, however, are still deficient in their fruit and vegetable intake.

NOT GETTING THE MESSAGE

Over the last several years, the U.S. Department of Health has recommended eating at least five portions of fruits and vegetables a day. Yet, only 1-in-7 achieve this quota. In fact, one-third of American adults eat only two servings of fruits and vegetables a day and are four times more likely to choose a processed snack instead. On any given day, about half the population eats no fruit at all.

A RAINBOW OF REASONS

There is a rainbow of reasons to eat a variety of colours from the produce aisle. Fruits and vegetables are typically fat free, low in salt and an excellent source of fibre. Some fruits and vegetables, such as carrots and cantaloupe, provide Vitamin A, which maintains eye health and immunity. Other fruits and vegetables, such as bananas and spinach, contain potassium, which is necessary for muscle functioning. Green vegetables, such as broccoli and asparagus, provide B vitamins, which are necessary for converting food into energy.

ANTIOXIDANT PROTECTION

Current research has measured the total antioxidant power of various foods, citing fruits and vegetables at the top of the list. Antioxidants protect our bodies from free radicals. Antioxidants also boost our immunity, help make our muscles stronger and support bone and skin health. Since eating the recommended daily servings of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables is not always realistic, try supplementing your diet with appropriate products.

So, try to get in the habit of eating plenty of fresh produce each day. It’s one of the biggest favours you can do for your body.



SECTION FIVE: Week 8: Fibre

RIPE FOR THE PICKING

FOOD	SELECTION	STORAGE
Artichoke	Choose plump heads with tightly closed leaves, heavy for size. Pull back one leaf to check heart for black blemishes.	Refrigerate in plastic bag up to 1 week. Keep dry to prevent mold growth. You can freeze cooked, but not raw, artichokes.
Asparagus	Avoid limp or wilted stalks. Choose odorless stalks with dry, tight tips.	Trim stems, wash and dry thoroughly. Wrap stem ends in a wet paper towel, and refrigerate in a plastic bag for up to 4 days.
Bell peppers	Choose firm, brightly coloured peppers with tight skin that are heavy for their size. Avoid dull, shriveled or pitted peppers.	Store unwashed peppers in the refrigerator in a plastic bag for use within 5 days. If it gets a small moldy spot, you can cut out the moldy spot and use the rest of the pepper. You can also slice or chop peppers, and freeze them in an airtight container.
Broccoli	Choose odorless heads with tight, bluish-green florets.	Mist with water, wrap loosely in damp paper towels, refrigerate and use within 3 to 5 days. Don't store in a sealed plastic bag.
Brussels sprouts	Choose firm, compact, bright-green heads. Buy on stalk when possible.	Refrigerate unwashed Brussels sprouts in an unsealed plastic bag up to 1 week.
Cabbage	Choose heads with compact leaves that are heavy for their size.	Refrigerate unwashed cabbage in an unsealed plastic bag for up to 7 days.
Carrots	Choose well-shaped, smooth, firm, crisp carrots with deep colour and fresh, green tops. Avoid soft, wilted or split carrots.	Refrigerate in an unsealed plastic bag with tops removed up to 2 weeks.
Cauliflower	Choose cauliflower with compact, creamy-white florets and bright-green, firmly attached leaves. Avoid brown spots or loose sections that are spread out.	Refrigerate in loose plastic bag up to 5 days.
Celery	Choose straight, rigid stalks with fresh leaves. Avoid pithy, woody or limp stalks.	Refrigerate in plastic bag or wrap in foil for 1 week or more.
Corn on the Cob	Choose ears with green husks, fresh silks and tight rows of kernels.	Refrigerate with husks on for use as soon as possible, or within 1 to 2 days.
Cucumber	Choose firm, well-shaped cucumbers with dark green colour, heavy for size.	Refrigerate in a loose plastic bag up to 1 week.
Aubergine	Choose fruits that are smooth, unwrinkled, and heavy for their size. The flesh should feel springy and bounce back when pressed.	Aubergine bruises easily and is quite perishable. Store in a loose plastic bag in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days.
Green beans	Choose fresh, well-coloured beans that snap easily when bent.	Refrigerate unwashed beans in a loose plastic bag, use within 1 week.
Spring onions	Choose stalks with fresh, green tops and slightly white ends.	Refrigerate in a loose plastic bag for use as soon as possible.
Iceberg lettuce	Choose heads with fresh, clean outer leaves and compact inner leaves.	Rinse head upon purchase; dry on paper towels. Refrigerate in a loose plastic bag for use within 1 week. Don't store with apples, pears or bananas.

SECTION FIVE: Week 8: Fibre

FOOD	SELECTION	STORAGE
Lettuce	Choose lettuce with crisp leaves. Avoid brown edges.	After purchase, rinse well, dry with paper towels or in a salad spinner. Refrigerate in plastic bag up to 1 week. Don't store with apples, pears or bananas.
Mushrooms	Choose well-shaped mushrooms with firm texture. Avoid spots and slime	Refrigerate in original container or paper bag up to 1 week.
Onions	Choose onions that are firm and dry with bright, smooth outer skins.	Store whole onions in a cool, dark, well-ventilated place for use within 4 weeks. Refrigerate cut onions in a tightly sealed container for use within 2 to 3 days.
Potatoes	All varieties should be clean, firm, smooth, dry and uniform in size.	Store in a cool, dark, well-ventilated place for use within 3 to 5 weeks
Radishes	Choose smooth, brightly coloured, medium-sized radishes. Attached tops should be green and fresh looking.	Refrigerate in plastic bag for use within 1 week. Remove tops before storing.
Spinach	Choose fresh, crisp, green bunches with no evidence of insect damage.	Loosely wrap in damp paper towel. Refrigerate in loose plastic bag for use within 3 to 5 days.
Squash	For all varieties, choose glossy, small- to medium-sized squash, heavy for size.	Refrigerate for use within 3 to 4 days.
Tomatoes	Choose tomatoes with bright, shiny skins and firm flesh.	Store at room temperature away from direct sunlight; use within 1 week after ripe.
Apples	Choose firm, shiny, smooth-skinned apples with intact stems. Should smell fresh, not musty.	Refrigerate in plastic bag away from foods with a strong odor. Use within 3 weeks.
Avocado	Choose avocado with firm skin and no soft spots, firm but yielding-to-gentle pressure when ripe.	Store when unripe at room temperature in paper bag; place an apple or banana in the bag to hasten ripening. Refrigerate when ripe for 2 to 3 days.
Bananas	Choose fruit with slight green on stem and tip, firm without bruises. Ripens after harvest.	Store unripe fruit at room temperature. Store ripe fruit in refrigerator for up to 2 weeks; skin may turn black. To freeze, peel the banana, wrap in foil and freeze. Tastes like ice cream!
Blueberries	Choose firm, plump, dry berries with dusty bloom and uniform in size.	Refrigerate for 10 to 14 days. You can also freeze whole blueberries – rinse, pat dry and freeze in an airtight container.
Cantaloupe	Choose fragrant, symmetrical melons, heavy for size with no visible bruises and yellow or cream undertone beneath the webbing. Stem end should give to gentle pressure.	Store uncut at room temperature up to 1 week. Refrigerate cut melon in airtight container up to 5 days. Wash melon before cutting to avoid transfer of surface bacteria to the inside of the fruit.
Cherries	Select firm, red cherries with stems attached. Avoid soft, shriveled or blemished cherries.	Refrigerate for up to 10 days.
Grapefruit	Choose fruits with thin, smooth, firm blemish-free skins that are heavy for their size.	Store at room temperature for 1 week or under refrigeration for 2 to 3 weeks.
Grapes	Choose plump, firm fruits that are firmly attached to the stem.	Store in a loose plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

SECTION FIVE: Week 8: Fibre

RIPE FOR THE PICKING (CONTINUED)

FOOD	SELECTION	STORAGE
Honeydew melon	Choose well-shaped fruits that are nearly spherical. Should have a waxy, not fuzzy, surface and feel heavy for size. They should be fragrant.	Store in refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Wash melon before cutting to avoid transfer of surface bacteria to the inside of the fruit.
Kiwi	Choose slightly firm fruit with a rough, fuzzy skin.	Store unripened fruit in plastic bags under refrigeration for up to 6 weeks.
Lemon, limes	Choose lemons and limes with firm, thin, smooth skin, heavy for size.	Refrigerate up to 2 weeks.
Mango	Choose slightly firm mangos with sweet aroma. Avoid sap on skin.	Store at room temperature 1 to 2 days. Refrigerate peeled, cut mangos.
Nectarine	Choose firm nectarines with smooth skin.	Store unripe in paper bag until ripe, then store at room temperature for use within 2 to 3 days.
Orange	Choose oranges with firm, smooth skins, heavy for size.	Store at room temperature for 1 to 2 days. Refrigerate for 1 to 2 weeks.
Peach	Choose peaches with firm, fuzzy skins that yield to gentle pressure when ripe. Avoid blemishes.	Store unripe peaches in paper bag. When ripe, store at room temperature for use within 1 to 2 days.
Pear	Choose firm fruit, then check the neck for ripeness daily by applying gentle pressure to the stem end of the pear with your thumb. When it yields to the pressure, it's ready to eat.	Store unripe pears in paper bag at room temperature. Refrigerate ripe pears.
Pineapple	Choose pineapples with dark-green leaves, heavy for size. Avoid soft or dark spots and dry-looking leaves.	Eat as soon as possible. Refrigerate cut pineapple for 2 to 3 days. Wash fruit before cutting to avoid transfer of surface bacteria to the inside of the fruit.
Plum	Choose plump plums with smooth skins. Avoid bruises and soft spots.	Store unripe plums in paper bag until ripe. Refrigerate ripe plums.
Raspberries	Choose dry, plump, firm berries. Avoid wet or moldy berries.	Do not wash until ready to eat. Refrigerate for use within 1 to 2 days.
Strawberries	Choose shiny, firm fruit with a bright-red colour. Caps should be fresh, green and intact. Avoid shriveled, mushy or leaky berries.	Do not wash until ready to eat. Store in refrigerator for 1 to 3 days.
Tangerine	Choose firm to semi-soft tangerines with deep orange colour, heavy for size. Avoid soft spots and dull or brown colour.	Refrigerate up to 2 weeks.
Watermelon	Choose symmetrical watermelons with dried stems and yellowish undersides, heavy for size with a hard rind.	Store whole watermelons at room temperature. Refrigerate cut watermelons in airtight container for use within 5 days. Wash melon before cutting to avoid transfer of surface bacteria to the inside of the fruit.