Fiber Facts: The Importance of a Plant-based Diet

What is fiber?
- Fiber is the general term for the indigestible part of plant foods
- Whole grain products, fruits, vegetables and legumes are high in fiber
- Dairy products, meats, fish, poultry and processed foods are often low in fiber

Did You Know?
The typical American diet only contains about 10-15 grams of fiber daily, however, it is recommended that women aim for 21-25 grams and men should aim for 30-38 grams daily.

What does fiber do?
- There are two types of fiber: Insoluble and Soluble
  - Insoluble fiber: helps to soften and increase the bulk of the stool. It can help with constipation, prevent colon disease and relieve hemorrhoids. Fruit and vegetable skin and the bran in whole wheat are high in this type of fiber.
  - Soluble fiber: forms a gel in water. This gel can bind to and help lower blood cholesterol and glucose levels. Fruits, dried peas/beans, barley, oat bran and rolled oats are high in this type of fiber.
- Most foods contain a combination of soluble and insoluble fiber

What are the health benefits of fiber?
- Regular bowel movements
- May reduce the risk of colon cancer
- Prevent constipation, relieve hemorrhoids and prevent diverticular disease
- Aid in weight control
- Can help lower cholesterol
- Can aid in controlling blood sugars and may help reduce insulin requirements

Here are some tips for adding high fiber foods to your diet:
- Eat 2-4 cups of fruits every day.
  - Choose fresh or frozen fruit instead of juice, canned or peeled fruit.
  - Have fruit as a snack between meals.
  - Add fruit to cereals, salads, yogurt or cottage cheese.
- Eat 3 or more cups of vegetables every day.
  - Choose fresh vegetables instead of canned.
  - Frozen vegetables (without sauce) are just as good as fresh to have on hand.
  - Add vegetables to sandwiches.
  - Use vegetables in a stir-fry or cut up fresh vegetables and enjoy with dip.
• Eat at least 3 ounces of whole grain every day.
  o Choose cereals with 5 grams or more of fiber per serving.
  o Choose whole grain breads with 3 grams or more of fiber per serving.
  o The first ingredient in breads and cereals should be 100% ‘whole grain’ or ‘whole wheat’.
  o Choose brown rice, wild rice, barley, or quinoa instead of white rice.
  o Add oat or wheat bran when baking muffins, cookies, pancakes, waffles or meatloaf.

• Eat at least ½ cup of beans, peas, potatoes with skin, or corn a few times a week.
  o Beans are a high-fiber replacement for animal protein in recipes.
  o Use cooked dry beans, peas or corn in soups, stews, side dishes, dips, casseroles, salads and pastas.
  o Add beans, peas or corn to tacos, burritos or rice.

• Mix-in high fiber items every day.
  o Add nuts or seeds to breakfast cereal, yogurt, salads, and desserts.
  o Edamame can be eaten as a fiber-rich appetizer.

Tip: Add fiber slowly to your diet if you do not eat a diet high in fiber-rich foods and include water (at least 6 glasses a day), otherwise you can develop gas, bloating, diarrhea or constipation

Which is most like your diet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Menu Low In Fiber</th>
<th>Menu High in Fiber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakfast:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Breakfast:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrambled eggs</td>
<td>Scrambled eggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>White toast w/ margarine</td>
<td>Oat bran toast w/ margarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, Orange Juice</td>
<td>Milk, fresh whole orange</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lunch:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato soup</td>
<td>Minestrone soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ turkey sandwich on white bread</td>
<td>½ turkey sandwich on whole wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate chip cookie &amp; milk</td>
<td>Fresh fruit &amp; milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dinner:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dinner:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled chicken</td>
<td>Grilled chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo Mein noodles &amp; string beans</td>
<td>Brown rice &amp; string beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate ice cream, Iced tea</td>
<td>Apple cobbler, Iced tea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
1. Harvard School of Public Health [www.hsph.harvard.edu](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu)
3. VA Nutrition and Food Services [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)