

Healthy Eating Month

HEALTHY TIP SHEET - MARCH



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Simple Ways to Increase the Fiber in Your Diet

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that is found in plant foods. It is an important nutrient with many health benefits. The American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends consuming 25 to 38 grams of fiber per day. Eating enough fiber has been shown to:

- Help keep your digestive system running smoothly
- Support heart health
- Maintain blood sugar levels that are already within the normal range
- Aid in weight loss

Before you get started down the path of more dietary fiber—keep in mind these things:

Take it slow and don't forget to hydrate

Increase fiber intake gradually to prevent excess gas and bloating and to allow your gastrointestinal tract time to adjust. As you increase your fiber intake, increase your fluids as well. Fiber pulls water into the intestines. Without adequate hydration, fiber can aggravate, rather than alleviate, constipation. So, try to drink at least eight glasses of water a day.

Choose a wide variety of fiber sources

Plant foods provide two types of fiber: soluble fiber (which increases the feeling of fullness) and insoluble fiber (which aids the digestive system and promotes regularity). Peas, beans, oats, and fruits are sources of soluble fiber, and whole grains and vegetables provide mostly insoluble fiber. Some foods provide both!

Pick whole grain foods over refined carbohydrates

Whole grain foods are a natural source of dietary fiber. Unlike refined carbohydrates (think white bread), whole grains retain the kernel's fiber-rich outer shell, known as bran. To identify whole grains, look for these ingredients on labels: whole wheat, hard red winter wheat, barley, triticale, oats, rye, brown rice, buckwheat, millet, oatmeal and bulgur.

Add fresh fruit to every meal

Whether added to cereal, eaten as a snack, or enjoyed as a simple dessert, fresh fruit is a sweet way to add fiber to your diet. The fruits highest in fiber include apples, berries, prunes, pears and oranges.

Load up on legumes

High-fiber legumes like beans, peas, and lentils - are among the best sources of fiber. Add one serving to your day by incorporating legumes into salads, soups, and casseroles, or puree them to make a delicious dip.