



A Healthy, Fiber-Rich Diet Is Important

Food can be said to consist of two parts. One part is fully digested by our stomach and intestines, which break it down into component parts and then into our bodies. The other part of food is called fiber, which is not absorbed by the body, but rather stays right there in the intestines until it is expelled in a bowel movement.

Both these parts of food are necessary. The digestible part gives us energy and the raw material to maintain and to build our bodies. The indigestible fiber is also important. Fiber stays in the intestinal track where it attracts water from the body. The result is a bowel movement that is bulky and soft enough to be easily passed through the tract.



A diet rich in fiber promotes regular bowel movements. Without enough fiber, the bowel movements tend to be clay-like, constipated, and hard to pass. For children who are struggling not to have accidents, the bulk of the fiber-rich bowel movement makes itself known, so the child senses the coming movement well, and it is then easier for him to decide that it is time to go to the bathroom. Being slippery, the fiber-rich bowel movement is also not painful, so there is no fear in going to the toilet.

In truth, it is not only children who benefit from a fiber-rich diet. In adults a fiber-rich diet tends to lower cholesterol, promote an appropriate weight, keep hemorrhoids in check, and help to prevent diverticulosis and colon cancer.

Because our Western diet tends to be very refined, with the fiber part of food taken away, constipation is a frequent affliction. So, to have a healthy, fiber-rich diet, we need to think about what foods we should eat to give us enough fiber every day.

Here are some tips on increasing fiber in your diet (courtesy of General Mills).

1. Look for Bran, Whole Wheat, and Whole Grain on the ingredient labels on foods.
2. Fruit is a good source of fiber, but only if you eat the whole fruit, and don't just drink the juice (which generally is high in sugar.)
3. Eat the skin on fruits and vegetables. The skins have fiber and nutrients, including vitamins.
4. Beans and legumes have lots of fiber. These would be peas, pinto beans, kidney beans, lentils, and black-eyed peas.
5. Nuts have fiber—almonds, sunflower seeds, and soy nuts.
6. Berries are especially good sources of fiber—raspberries, blackberries, and boysenberries.
7. Brown is better than white—brown rice, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat flour, whole wheat breads, and whole grain crackers.
8. Instead of potato chips, try low-fat popcorn, whole grain pretzels, and oven-crisped whole wheat pita triangles.
9. Bran cereals are excellent sources of fiber—All Bran or Fiber One especially. A day that begins with a bowl of high-fiber cereal gets you well on your way to a fiber-rich, healthy-eating day.