

# Fibre and Health

**Abstract:** Fibre is the 'scaffolding' that supports a plant. The food content of plants is enclosed within its cells: fibre is contained in the cell walls and is found in other structural parts of the plant.

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## WHAT IS A FIBRE?

Dietary fibre is the medical term for Roughage, a lot of which is not 'rough' at all- for example tomatoes, strawberries and many other vegetables and fruits.

## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

- Fibre does a lot more than provide 'roughage' to prevent constipation.
- Lack of fibre seems to be connected with various disorders of the bowel, including piles and a serious inflammation called diverticulitis.
- There is reason to believe that lack of fibre may lead to diabetes and even heart disease.
- Fibre slows down digestion.
- Soluble fibre, such as that in beans and lentils controls blood sugar more effectively than insoluble fibre and may also lower blood cholesterol if high.
- Insoluble fibre such as wheat bran soaks up water thus providing bulk, which causes waste to be passed more quickly through the gut and also gives the feeling of being full.
- Eating more fibre may actually help staying slim.
- Food with plenty of fibre like potatoes and bread can be satisfying without giving too many calories.
- Modern food processing usually removes this fibre, so we tend to have less of it in our diets than our parents & grandparents did.

## HOW DOES IT HELP?

The purpose of fibre is to pass through our digestive system mostly unchanged and unabsorbed.

But in the process it...

- Softens the stools so that they pass more easily.
- Acts as a sponge, taking up fluid and softening

the bowel contents.

- Helps us feel fuller, reduces the amount of energy absorbed from our food and slows down the rate at which energy is absorbed.
- Assists the action of beneficial bacteria in the bowel.
- It tends to induce weight-loss as part of a calorie-controlled diet.

## HOW TO INCREASE FIBRE IN OUR DAILY DIET?

- Don't just increase the amount of Fibre in the diet.
- Eat more *Roti*/bread especially wholemeal bread. *Roti*/Bread gives you fibre and nutrients without concentrated calories.
- Eat more potatoes (with skin). Both *roti*/bread and potatoes are excellent 'fillers' and needn't be fattening if you don't load them with butter or fry them in fat.
- Eat a high-fibre cereal for breakfast. (But go easy on the sugar). The more bran a cereal contains, the higher its fibre content.
- Try more meals based on beans, peas, lentils and other pulses, using meat more sparingly.
- Eat more vegetables. Vegetables, particularly the green leafy ones, are high in fibre. But don't overcook them as lots of the properties will be lost. Just cook enough to soften.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and salads. Even the softer fruits, like melons or oranges, contain fibre. Fruits and vegetables because of their water content are low in calories and can help you stay slim.
- Make room for all this good food by cutting down on sugary and fatty things like biscuits, sweets and crisps, especially between meals.
- Reduce your intake of processed foods, fats,

sugar and white flour (*maida*) products

- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day
- Eat more fresh, vegetables, beans, pulses, nuts (not roasted/salted), seeds and wholegrain products.

### How does it benefit us?

Fibre helps in the following ways

- It helps prevent constipation
- It can avoid strain being put on the digestive system
- It assists in the treatment of: diverticular disease, gallstones appendicitis, hiatus hernia and varicose veins

### FIBRE FOODS

Fibre content (grams) per average serving

Whole pasta	9.6
High bran cereal	8.0
Spinach	6.3
Baked beans	5.4
Bananas	5.1
Wholemeal bread	4.3
Fresh peas	3.9
Corn flakes	3.3
Figs (dried & raw)	2.3
Museli	2.2
Oranges	2.0

## Low Salt Diet - Dr SUSHMA JAISWAL

Low salt diet will help women who are concerned about the foods they eat and want to adopt a low salt, healthy eating pattern. It will also help those following a diabetic weight reduction, cholesterol lowering or high fibre-eating plan.

If the guidelines are followed properly, one will find that all foods have a natural flavor of their own and that a low salt, balanced eating pattern is quite enjoyable.

Women often ask, "What is a healthy diet and do I have to give up all my favorite foods?" You can't blame them with so much conflicting advice about nutrition confusing them.

The Healthy Diet Pyramid provides simple guidelines to follow in planning everyday eating pattern. The pyramid is based on cereals, grains, fruits and vegetables and these foods should provide the main source of energy.

When selecting cereals, rice or bread, it is important to give preference to those high in fibre and low in added salt.

Our eating plan should include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables - at least one serve of fresh fruit per day and at least three serves of vegetables. Fruit and vegetables are very rich sources of potassium and fibre and together with the fibre contained in whole meal cereals help to prevent constipation.

The next group up the scale on the pyramid is one

comprising milk and milk products together with meat, fish and nuts. These foods are high in protein but we need only relatively small amounts of them to meet our protein requirements. As whole milk and cheese contain significant amounts of saturated fats, we should limit our intake of these foods.

Meat is a rich source of saturated fats, so one should switch from large servings of fatty meat to small serving of lean meat. For those with primarily non vegetarian diet, it will be good to substitute some plant protein foods for animal products for at least a couple of the main meals each week. For example lentils, peas, beans and soya can be used for meatless main dishes.

At the top of the pyramid are the foods which should be used only in very small amounts. They are fats, oils and sugar. We need only a very small amount of fats or oils each day. The amount of fat or oil used in cooking should be kept to a minimum and fat free cooking methods should be adopted.

We do not require sugar but many sweet foods are enjoyable to eat. If these foods are used occasionally in moderation they should not cause a major nutritional problem. In many recipes for cakes and desserts the amount of sugar specified could be successfully reduced or fortified sugar can be used.