



# BROWN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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## The Benefits of Dietary Fiber Teresa Severson, RN, PHN

A common nutrition recommendation is to eat more fiber! Eating the right amount of fiber can decrease your risk for obesity, diabetes, heart disease, hemorrhoids, and colorectal cancer. It is recommended that women consume about 21 to 25 grams per day, while men should reach for 30 to 38 grams. Some foods with the highest fiber content include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes.

While fiber intake will reduce your risk for some chronic diseases, the immediate benefits for your body will be regular stools (reducing constipation) and feeling fuller or more satisfied after eating a meal. Dietary fiber is a unique food component. It passes through our digestive systems without actually being absorbed like proteins or carbohydrates. More specifically, soluble fiber will dissolve in water to create a gel-like substance that helps lower cholesterol and glucose levels, while insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water so it helps create bulk in stool aiding in issues with constipation. Eating a mix of both soluble and insoluble fibers is crucial for our digestive system to function properly. Foods with soluble fiber include peas, carrots, apples, oranges, beans, oats, and barley. Foods with insoluble fiber include cauliflower, green beans, potatoes, wheat, and nuts.

Fiber will be most effective when consumed with water. Be sure to drink enough water to aid in proper digestion. Too much fiber, too fast, can cause gassiness and abdominal cramps so try to introduce more fiber friendly foods slowly until you reach the recommended daily intake.

A few tips you may find helpful to eating more fiber; cook and bake with whole grain flour, add lentils to soups, top salads or nachos with beans, and intentionally include fruits and vegetables in all meals and snacks. The best fiber filled foods are natural foods! Avoid processed foods, juices, and fiber supplements, unless

recommended by your medical provider. March is National Nutrition Month, which makes it a great time to use these tips for adding fiber to your daily food intake so that you can obtain many health benefits.