

Fiber:

Look to Fruits and Vegetables

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We're supposed to eat 25 grams per day according to the Nutrition Facts label for the 2,000-calorie level. The average American consumes 12 grams. So there's some work to be done here.

One thing to remember about fiber is it is only found in plants. You can get plenty of fiber if you include whole grain products (including oats and barley), fruits and vegetables (especially eaten raw with the peel), and legumes like beans, peas and lentils in your diet.

Although meat and poultry look fibrous and are sometimes hard to chew, only plant foods contain fiber. It's the protein in these foods that adds the texture.

There are two main types of dietary fiber: those that dissolve in water which are soluble and those that do not which are insoluble. They have different, but equally important roles in maintaining good health. Dietary fiber has preventive health benefits for many conditions, including diverticular disease, colon cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

When we look to the food label for information-dietary fiber-is the term we see. The manufacturer may also list the amount of insoluble fiber and soluble fiber.

How do you know when reading a label if the food is a good source of fiber? Good sources of fiber contain 3 to less than 5 grams of fiber or 10 to 19 percent of the Daily Value for fiber. High sources of fiber contain 5 grams or more of fiber which is 20 percent or more of the Daily Value.

When selecting food styles for fiber, the more highly processed a food and the more "instant" its preparation, the lower its fiber content. For example, one medium whole apple with peel has 3.73 grams of fiber; without the peel, 2.09 grams; 1/2 (one-half) cup applesauce has 1.5 grams of fiber; and 1 cup apple juice has .25 grams of fiber. (Source: USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 14).

Since fruits and vegetables are a major source of fiber-and only occasionally have a label you can read-you might want to explore the USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/>. You have the ability to search by a food type for a specific amount, or you can generate "huge" lists of foods either arranged alphabetically or by content.

I like using the Nutrition Facts

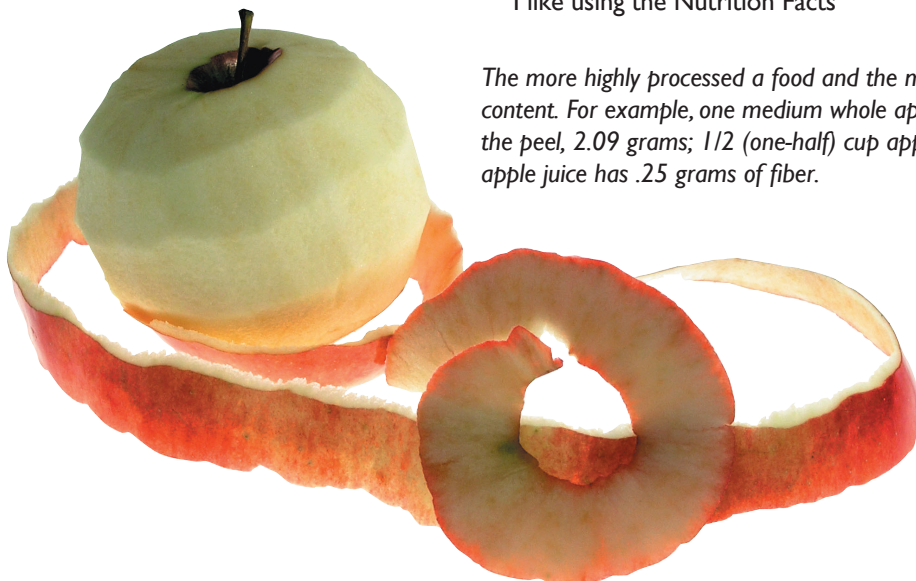
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labeling, and focus on the percent Daily Value for fiber. It's fun searching for the bread with the highest amount-or being set straight when you think it's high in fiber and it's not! Read labels, compare them, and select styles of food which give you the best health dividends.

Your best fiber sources are from food. MyPyramid recommends at least 3 ounces of whole grains consumed daily. Whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables are all good sources of fiber. Adequate fiber intake may reduce your risk for heart disease.

Just a word of caution-increase your fiber content gradually. Increasing fiber too rapidly can initially cause excess gas formation or diarrhea. Since water-insoluble fibers absorb water, it is also important to drink plenty of liquids along with increased dietary fiber intake. Include at least six, eight-ounce glasses of fluid each day. Also, try to spread high fiber foods out throughout the day, at meals and snacks.



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