



Fiber and Healthy Aging

If you eat plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and legumes, then you may consume the recommended 22 grams of fiber per day for women age 51+ and 28 grams per day for men age 51+. However, the average American consumes only 17 grams of fiber per day, and only 5% of the population consumes the recommended amount of fiber on a regular basis.

Fiber is the part of plant foods that our body doesn't completely digest. Consuming foods that are naturally high in fiber provides a wide range of important vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients necessary for good digestion and overall health.

Fiber has a direct and positive impact on the digestive system. Consuming fiber helps promote good digestive health by increasing fecal bulk, increasing stool frequency, and reducing the amount of time it takes for food to be digested. Chronically low intakes of fiber can lead to bloating, constipation, or abdominal pain and discomfort.

Fiber also plays an important role in overall health. One large study with over 1600 adults age 50+ found that people who ate more fiber experienced a lower risk of age-related diseases and disability, including high blood pressure, diabetes, depression and even cognitive problems. The researchers discovered that people with the highest intake of fiber had an almost 80% greater likelihood of living a long and healthy life over a 10-year follow-up.

Use these 5 tips to increase fiber intake and help promote healthy aging:

1. Much of the fiber in fruits and vegetables is in the skin. Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating, and include the skin whenever possible such as in baked/mashed potatoes or raw apples, pears or cucumbers. Cooking does not reduce your food's fiber content.
2. Eat whole fruits and vegetables instead of drinking juice unless you use a juicer that incorporates the entire food.
3. Choose whole grain breads, crackers and cereals that are made from the entire grain, including the outside husk that contains most of the fiber. Look for the word 'whole' in the first ingredient to be sure you're purchasing a product that is made from 100% whole grains.
4. Add legumes to your meals several times per week. Choose chili made with pinto or kidney beans, enjoy lentil or split pea soup, toss chickpeas into salads, and incorporate any type of legume into favorite casserole recipes.
5. Drink 8-16 oz. of water with meals. Fiber in the intestines absorbs fluid, and drinking water with meals will help the fiber move through your digestive system.

Source: Lynn Grieger RDN, CDE, CPT, CWC ©www.foodandhealth.com

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