High-Fiber Diet

A high-fiber diet changes your normal diet to include more whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. Changes in the diet involve replacing refined carbohydrates with unrefined foods. The calorie level of the diet is essentially unchanged. The Dietary Reference Intake (*recommended amount*) for adult males is 38 grams per day. For adult females, it is 25 grams per day. Pregnant and lactating women should consume 28 grams of fiber per day.

Fiber is the intact part of a plant that is not broken down during digestion. Functional fiber is fiber that has been isolated from the plant to provide a beneficial effect in the body.

PURPOSE

- Increase stool bulk.
- Ease and regulate bowel movements.
- Lower cholesterol.

INDICATIONS THAT YOU NEED MORE FIBER

- Constipation and hemorrhoids.
- Uncomplicated diverticulosis (*intestine condition*) and irritable bowel syndrome.
- Weight management.
- As a protective measure against hardening of the arteries (*atherosclerosis*), diabetes, and cancer.

NOTE OF CAUTION

If you have a digestive or bowel problem, ask your caregiver for advice before adding high-fiber foods to your diet. Some of the following medical problems are such that a high-fiber diet should not be used without consulting your caregiver.

DO NOT USE WITH:

- Acute diverticulitis (*intestine infection*).
- Partial small bowel obstructions.
- Complicated diverticular disease involving bleeding, rupture (*perforation*), or abscess (*boil, furuncle*).
- Presence of autonomic neuropathy (*nerve damage*) or gastric paresis (*stomach cannot empty itself*).

GUIDELINES FOR INCREASING FIBER IN THE DIET

- Start adding fiber to the diet slowly. A gradual increase of about 5 more grams (2 slices of whole-wheat bread, 2 servings of most fruits or vegetables, or 1 bowl of high-fiber cereal) per day is best. Too rapid an increase in fiber may result in constipation, flatulence, and bloating.
- Drink enough water and fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow. Water, juice, or caffeine-free drinks are recommended. Not drinking enough fluid may cause constipation.
- Eat a variety of high-fiber foods rather than one type of fiber.
- Try to increase your intake of fiber through using high-fiber foods rather than fiber pills or supplements that contain small amounts of fiber.
- **The goal is to change the types of food eaten.** Do not supplement your present diet with high-fiber foods, but replace foods in your present diet.

INCLUDE A VARIETY OF FIBER SOURCES

- Replace refined and processed grains with whole grains, canned fruits with fresh fruits, and incorporate other fiber sources. White rice, white breads, and most bakery goods contain little or no fiber.
- Brown whole-grain rice, buckwheat oats, and many fruits and vegetables are all good sources of fiber. These include: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, beets, sweet potatoes, white potatoes (skin on), carrots, tomatoes, eggplant, squash, berries, fresh fruits, and dried fruits.

- Cereals appear to be the richest source of fiber. Cereal fiber is found in whole grains and bran. Bran is the fiber-rich outer coat of cereal grain, which is largely removed in refining. In whole-grain cereals, the bran remains. In breakfast cereals, the largest amount of fiber is found in those with "bran" in their names. The fiber content is sometimes indicated on the label.
- You may need to include additional fruits and vegetables each day.
- In baking, for 1 cup white flour, you may use the following substitutions:
  - 1 cup whole-wheat flour minus 2 tablespoons.
  - 1/2 cup white flour plus 1/2 cup whole-wheat flour.

References: Dietary Reference Intakes: Recommended Intakes for Individuals. National Academy of Sciences. Institute of Medicine. Food and Nutrition Board.

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