

## **So What's the Big Deal with Fiber Anyway?**

By Stu Yellin, Wnbf Pro Bodybuilder and Nutrition Coach

Anyone who has read a nutrition label or more likely perused any of the mass marketed health and fitness magazines at the checkout counter of your local supermarket has probably noticed the common stressing of a certain mysterious nutrient called "Fiber." While the particulars of this esoteric substance can sometimes be made to sound more complicated than need be (usually to make the author sound that much more informed), a basic understanding of what it is, and just how you can put that knowledge to good use can be a huge help on your personal health and fitness journey.

The most basic way to look at fiber is as remnants of plant based foods that will pass through your body undigested. This can serve to provide a number of advantages for people looking to control their weight, or even just be more health conscious.

There are two types of fiber we need concern ourselves with that are described based on their ability to dissolve in water; water soluble and water insoluble (creative names right?!) Soluble fiber sources would include beans, fruits, and whole grains. Insoluble fiber sources would include vegetables, fruits skins, and to an extent beans and whole wheat as well.

While both categories provide benefits, their actual approaches differ slightly. Water soluble fibers will actually slow the movement of other foods through your digestive system while the insoluble fibers will tend to "keep things moving along." Don't bother worrying about one or the other, as it's fairly safe to say that most fibrous foods contain a decent breakdown of each.

The most noticeable results of ingesting foods with adequate amounts of fiber are that they can leave you feeling fuller longer, as well as add to a quicker satiated feeling from your meal. On a more minutely detailed level, higher fiber foods have been shown to lower levels of insulin your body secretes during a meal, which can effectively blunt its appetite stimulating effect. This can make it much easier to turn down that second plate full of pancakes at breakfast. Additionally, due to the human body's inability to actually digest and derive calories from the fibrous content of foods, more calories are expended during the digestive attempt, as well as the general lower amount of overall calories in a fiber rich food choice when compared with a similarly volumous yet fiber-lacking counterpart.

More health related benefits of a fiber rich diet include helping to control and stabilize blood sugar levels. This occurs when soluble fiber delays nutrients' transport through your body, thus slowing their digestion and preventing large rises in circulating glucose. This benefit can play an important role in decreasing the risks of developing, or even assist in managing type 2 diabetes.

Foods rich in Soluble Fiber can also potentially lower cholesterol, as it can actually bind with the cholesterol in the intestine and help remove it from the body. Not a bad thing when you consider the studies pointing to this lessening the risks of heart disease and other ailments.

So how much of this wondrous substance should you be aiming for each day? Good question! Most experts feel that very few people in the United States get enough fiber each day for optimal health and functioning. The American Dietetic Association recommends 20 – 35g of fiber each day. While this may not sound like much when compared to more commonly discussed nutrients like carbohydrates (ie. 25g of carbs in an average banana), or protein (ie. 25g of protein in a 3 oz can of tuna fish), consider that a

nice filling bowl of oatmeal (1/2 cup precooked oats) will only yield about 4 grams! Suddenly getting enough fiber in your diet is starting to look like it may take a bit of planning, if not at least a small amount of consideration to achieve.

Most food categories will be varied in their amounts. A single cup serving of strawberries contains only 3 grams of fiber, while a same serving size amount of raspberries has more than double that with 8 grams! Similarly varied is lettuce. While Romaine and Iceberg can average about 1 gram per cup, red leaf and green leaf varieties have considerably less and wouldn't typically be thought of as a high fiber food. Luckily, these days anything you purchase in a store comes with a full breakdown of its nutritional components. Even if you're out and about, it's pretty likely that a smart phone or tablet to look up food items isn't too far out of reach.

Remember, because fiber is found only in plant based foods, unless you're a vegetarian, you may need to take a conscious look at your daily intake and assess if indeed you would benefit from adding some fiber to your eating plan each day. If not done solely for the betterment of any health concerns, consider just how very simple a step in weight (and fat!) management simply making certain food choices with an eye on fiber content can aid you in the big picture. It's really not as tough as it sounds, and believe me, a well-planned approach is not only pretty simple to implement, but will make any intelligent weight loss strategy more effective and much less of an inconvenience.

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