Figuring Out Fiber

What is fiber?
Fiber is the part of plant foods that the body cannot digest or absorb. It is best known for moving food through our bodies to keep us regular.

Why do I need fiber?
Fiber...
- Makes you feel full longer, which can help control your weight
- Slows the absorption of sugars, which can help control your blood sugar levels
- Decreases the amount of time waste is in your body, which helps to keep your bowel movements regular
- Lowers the bad cholesterol (LDL) and keeps your heart healthy
- Helps prevent constipation by adding bulk to your stool

How much do I need each day?
- Men, age 51+ need about 30 grams
- Women, age 51+ need about 21 grams

What is a GOOD source of fiber?
- A good source of fiber has at least 3 grams per serving
- Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and nuts all naturally have fiber

**Good Sources of Fiber:**
- Black beans, 1/2 cup ~ 8 grams
- Pinto beans, 1/2 cup ~ 7 grams
- Broccoli, 1 cup cooked ~ 5 grams
- Pear, 1 medium ~ 5 grams
- Blackberries, 1/2 cup ~ 4 grams
- Dried plums (prunes) 6 prunes ~ 4 grams
- Whole grain cereal, 1 cup ~ 4-6 grams
- Brown rice, 1 cup ~ 4 grams
- Whole wheat pasta 2/3 cup ~ 6 grams
- Almonds, 23 almonds ~ 3.5 grams
- Popcorn (air-popped), 3 cups ~ 3.5 grams
- Whole wheat bread, 1 slice ~ 2 grams

*Check the nutrition facts label to see how many grams of fiber are in the food you are eating.*
What about Constipation?

There are a number of causes of constipation. These include: medications, lack of fluids, low fiber diet, and inability or lack of exercise. The following are tips to help reduce and prevent constipation:

- Add fiber slowly to your diet. Keep a food log to see how much fiber you get each day, then add about 3 grams of fiber each day. If you add too much too quickly you may feel discomfort (gas, bloating, cramping).

- Be sure to drink plenty of fluids everyday. Aim for about 6-8 glasses of water to help keep you regular.

- Add more fruit and vegetables to your diet. Eat them as snacks, add them to soups and casseroles, and have as a side dish with main meals.

- Make sure at least half of your grains are whole grains.

- Add beans and nuts to dishes or have as a snack.

- Be physically active. Inactivity can lead to constipation, so increasing exercise will help to speed things up.

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Two Kinds of Fiber: Soluble vs. Insoluble

Soluble Fiber:
Is like a sponge, it soaks up cholesterol and keeps it from getting into your blood. It can also help control your blood sugars.

Examples:
- Apple
- Oats
- Beans
- Pears
- Nuts
- Flaxseeds

Insoluble Fiber:
Is like a brush. It cleans up your intestines and keeps waste moving. It helps to prevent constipation and colon cancer.

Examples:
- Nuts and seeds
- Skin of apples
- Whole wheat bread
- Barley
- Brown rice
- Skin of root vegetables

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This material was funded by USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your local DHS office, or call the URI SNAP-Ed nutrition program at 1-877-Food-URI (1-877-366-3874). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.