

Fiber: Your Gut's Dynamic Duo for Digestive Health & 6 Steps to Gut Health and Plant-Based Vitality!



Fiber is undeniably a star player when adopting a plant-based diet, offering a multitude of fantastic benefits for overall health and well-being. As plant foods are naturally rich in fibre, embracing a plant-based diet ensures ample intake of this essential nutrient. Fiber plays a crucial role in digestive health by:

- a) Promoting regular bowel movements, preventing constipation, supporting a healthy gut microbiome.
- b). Helping to regulate blood sugar levels by slowing the absorption of glucose, making it particularly beneficial for individuals with diabetes or insulin resistance.
- c). Fiber contributes to satiety and weight management by promoting feelings of fullness and reducing appetite.
- d) A lower risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers.

In the UK, the guidelines for fibre intake are provided by the government's National Health Service (NHS). The NHS recommends consuming 30 grams of fibre per day for adults, based on a healthy balanced diet. This recommendation is the same for both men and women. However, it is important to note that individual fibre needs may vary depending on factors such as age, sex, and activity level. Additionally, specific dietary recommendations may be provided by healthcare professionals for individuals with certain health conditions or dietary preferences. Therefore, if you are in any doubt, how much fibre you may need for your personal circumstances, please speak with a qualified health professional such as your GP, a registered nutritionist or dietician.

Dynamic Duo for Digestive Health

Fiber can be categorized into two main types: soluble fibre and insoluble fibre. Each type of fibre plays a unique role in promoting health and well-being.

Soluble Fiber:

- Soluble fibre dissolves in water to form a gel-like substance in the digestive tract.
- This type of fibre is found in foods such as oats, barley, legumes, fruits (such as apples, oranges, and berries), vegetables (such as carrots and broccoli), and seeds (such as flaxseeds and chia seeds).
- Soluble fibre helps to lower cholesterol levels by binding to cholesterol and preventing its absorption in the bloodstream, which can reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Additionally, soluble fibre slows down the digestion and absorption of carbohydrates, which helps to regulate blood sugar levels and improve insulin sensitivity, making it beneficial for individuals with diabetes or insulin resistance.
- Soluble fibre also contributes to feelings of fullness and satiety, which can aid in weight management by reducing appetite and calorie intake.

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Insoluble Fiber:

- Insoluble fibre does not dissolve in water and passes through the digestive tract relatively intact.
- This type of fibre is found in foods such as whole grains (such as wheat, brown rice, and quinoa), nuts, seeds, vegetables (such as cauliflower and green beans), and the skins of fruits and vegetables.
- Insoluble fibre adds bulk to stool and promotes regular bowel movements, preventing constipation and promoting digestive health.
- Additionally, insoluble fibre helps to maintain gut health by providing fuel for beneficial bacteria in the colon, supporting a healthy microbiome.
- While insoluble fibre does not directly lower cholesterol or regulate blood sugar levels like soluble fibre, it still plays a crucial role in overall health by promoting regularity and supporting digestive function.

Both soluble and insoluble fibre are important components of a healthy diet, and incorporating a variety of fibre-rich foods into meals and snacks can help individuals meet their daily fibre needs and reap the benefits of fibre for optimal health and well-being.

6 Steps to Gut Health and Plant-Based Vitality

1. **Hydration is Key:** Fiber absorbs water as it moves through the digestive tract, so it is important to stay well-hydrated to support smooth digestion. Drinking plenty of water throughout the day can help prevent constipation and promote regularity.
2. **Gradual Increase:** If you are transitioning to a plant-based diet or increasing your fibre intake, it is best to do so gradually to allow your digestive system to adjust. Rapidly increasing fibre intake can lead to bloating, gas, and discomfort, so take it slow and gradually increase fibre-rich foods in your diet over time.
<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating-and-plant-based-diets.html>
3. **Include Both Types:** Aim to include both soluble and insoluble fibre-rich foods in your diet for maximum health benefits. Each type of fibre plays a unique role in promoting digestive health, so incorporating a variety of fibre sources ensures comprehensive support for your gut.
4. **Diverse Sources:** Explore a wide range of plant-based foods to diversify your fibre intake and reap the benefits of different types of fibre. Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds in your diet to ensure you are getting a broad spectrum of nutrients, including fibre.
5. **Fiber Supplements:** While it is best to obtain fibre from whole foods, fibre supplements can be helpful for individuals who struggle to meet their daily fibre needs through diet alone. However, it is important to choose supplements made from natural sources and to follow package instructions for dosage and usage. Please contact a suitably qualified health professional such as your GP, registered nutritionist, or dietician to discuss your personal circumstances if you feel it may be necessary and appropriate for you.

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6. **Pair with Protein:** When planning meals, consider pairing fibre-rich foods with protein-rich foods to create balanced and satisfying meals. Combining fibre and protein can help stabilize blood sugar levels, promote fullness, and support overall health and vitality. <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/helpingyoueatwell/vegan.html>
7. **Pair with Healthy Carbohydrates/Fats:** Pairing fibre with healthy plant-based fats and carbohydrates can enhance the nutritional profile and overall balance of your meals.

Combining fibre-rich foods with plant-based fats and carbohydrates increases the nutrient density of your meals. This means you are not only getting essential fibre, but also a variety of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants from the other food components. Including some healthy fats, and carbohydrates together in a meal helps promote feelings of fullness and satisfaction as well as important nutrition. This can prevent overeating and support weight management goals. British Nutrition Foundation. (2016). Fullness and Satiety.

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/nutritionscience/appetite-and-weight-control/fullness-and-satiety.html> Consuming fibre along with healthy plant-based fats and carbohydrates can help regulate blood sugar levels. Fiber slows down the absorption of glucose in the bloodstream, while healthy fats and complex carbohydrates provide sustained energy without causing rapid spikes in blood sugar. <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/eating-with-diabetes/healthy-eating-and-diabetes> The combination of these nutrients promotes regular bowel movements, prevents constipation, and supports a healthy gut microbiome. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/good-foods-for-digestive-health/>

BONUS: Fiber-Rich Quinoa Salad with Avocado Dressing

I have created the above salad for anyone to try. It is a well-rounded and nutritious meal that checks all the boxes for fibre, protein, healthy fats, and carbohydrates. It is a delicious and satisfying option for anyone looking to enjoy a wholesome plant-based meal. The recipe can be found on the Alton Sustainable Eating section of the Alton Climate Action Network (ACAN) website and is a separate resource. Enjoy!