

The Joy of Fiber (*in addition to tapered turds*)

Introduction:

Last month's ask the doctor article focused on the benefits of consuming a high-fiber diet in terms of **improving bowel function**. What the article did not mention is that there are two types of dietary fiber: Last month's article focused on "**insoluble**" fiber. The second type of fiber is "**soluble**" fiber, which is the focus of this month's article. Soluble fiber promotes weight loss and lowers risk of cardiac disease along with many other health benefits.

Soluble fiber: how it works

Soluble fiber forms a gel inside your gut, which slows the absorption of sugars into your blood stream. Putting the breaks on the absorption of calories derived from "carbs" means that you do not get hungry as quickly as you would if your diet was lacking in soluble fiber. Thus, a diet with a high intake of soluble fiber promotes weight loss.

There are multiple other benefits of eating a diet high in soluble fiber. It reduces the risk of developing adult onset diabetes (DM II). It also lowers the risk of developing breast cancer. Additionally, **soluble fiber** attaches to cholesterol particles and prevents their absorption. This helps to lower blood cholesterol levels and thus reduces the risk of developing heart disease.

How do you know if you are getting enough soluble fiber in your diet?

As with insoluble fiber there is no easy way to measure your intake of either type of fiber. Since both types are found in many foods (see next section), having normal bowel habits, (i.e. Tapered Turds) as discussed last month, is an indirect indicator of adequate intake of both types of fiber.

An indicator of inadequate intake of soluble fiber is weight gain. If you are having problems losing weight it is reasonable to assume that your diet may be lacking in

soluble fiber. If weight gain is a problem, ensuring adequate soluble fiber in your diet is one approach to dealing with this issue.

Another indicator of inadequate intake of soluble fiber is elevated blood cholesterol. Before jumping on the Lipitor bandwagon, it is worth modifying your diet to ensure that low fiber intake is not contributing to your cholesterol problem. Even if you are on a cholesterol lowering medication, it is still important to get more fiber into your diet.

Diet: The key to adequate fiber intake.

The simple approach to getting sufficient fiber in your diet is to minimize calories derived from processed food and to replace with calories derived from “whole foods” (i.e. unprocessed or minimally processed foods). As described in last month’s article, fiber is removed from processed foods to prolong shelf life. In addition, chemicals are added to processed foods to prolong shelf life and improve taste.

I have found that adding calories from minimally processed foods is easy. Below are just a few examples of healthy foods rich in fiber and in micronutrients.

Fruits:

- Berries: blue, black, and raspberries: all great sources of fiber and make ideal snacks.
- Asian pears and apples are great sources of fiber, if the **skin is not removed**.
- Avoid fruit juices: full of sugar and lacking in fiber.

Seeds

- **Chia seeds:** combine high fiber with good taste (see article on Chia Fresca).
- Flax seeds: equal in fiber content to chia seeds and less costly, but less tasty.
- All seeds are great sources of fiber: (try pumpkin, sesame, sunflower for taste and convenience).

Nuts:

- All tree nuts are full of fiber and other nutrients: They are also a great snack to bridge the gap between meals.
- My Favorites: almonds, walnuts, pecans and cashews.
- Peanuts (legumes) are rich in both types of fiber and are an excellent choice of fiber. Don't forget peanut butter which is also a great snack when spread on celery.

Whole grains:

- Pearl Barley (ranked as one the worlds 100 healthy foods).
- Oatmeal.
- Most other whole grains including: Quinoa, brown rice, bugler wheat, whole rye and many others.

Vegetables:

- **Beans** (Black beans, navy beans and lima beans are high in fiber and are also an excellent source of protein).
- Lentils
- Peas
- Artichokes
- Brussels sprouts
- Broccoli
- Acorn Squash
- And my favorite "super food" **avocados** (high in fiber and high in calories derived from healthy plant fat).

Conclusion:

There are a wide variety of choices when it comes to getting adequate fiber in your diet. Modifying your diet to substitute calories from processed foods to calories from "whole foods" is easy and has major long-term health benefits.

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