

# Our Good Friend

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Many of us know about fiber because we often see commercials on TV touting the latest fiber supplement to make us more “regular”. At the grocery store, you don’t have to look far to see cereals and snacks with the fiber content loud and clear on the front of the packaging.

**But what is fiber and why do we need it? What’s the deal with soluble and insoluble? How much do we need and where should it come from?**

**Fiber is the indigestible part of plant food, seeds, and grains.** It is in some foods that contain carbohydrates, like breads, beans, rice, vegetables, and fruits. It might seem odd that we should need something in our food that our body cannot digest, but that quality is exactly why fiber is so good for us. The most common reason people want to consume fiber is to treat or prevent constipation. *Insoluble* fiber is at work for this job by adding bulk and roughage to the food and waste products traveling through the digestive system, which aids in moving things right along. People who are prone to Irritable Bowel Syndrome, have polyps or hemorrhoids benefit from adding more insoluble fiber to their diet, as these conditions are typically the result of chronic constipation.

**Fiber has other jobs, as well.** *Soluble* fiber is the type that dissolves in water. Foods such as oatmeal, apples, and carrots contain soluble fiber. This type of fiber removes bad cholesterol (LDLs) from our blood, thus improving our cholesterol ratio. Fiber also helps us regulate blood pressure.

**From a weight management standpoint, fiber is our friend.** Foods containing fiber add bulk with minimum calories. Consider a 4 ounce steak: 260 calories. Compare this to 4 ounces of black beans: 150 calories. While this is the same amount of food and both great sources of protein, the black beans will fill you up and save over 100 calories. In this way, fiber helps us manage our weight.

**It is best to get fiber from real food versus supplements.** Not only will this help you have a generally healthy diet, but also, you will be spreading out your consumption of fiber throughout the day, which reduces the stress on your digestive system. Adults should get at least 25 grams of fiber per day.

**Most Americans are not getting this much fiber.** If you don’t think that you are currently reaching 25 grams a day, do not attempt to jump right into it tomorrow. Gradually increase your fiber intake so that your body has time to adjust. Your digestive system will thank you for increasing gradually and your heart will thank you for the long term benefits.