

Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

January 2008 Newsletter

Fiber Focus Month

By Mindy Bell, BS

Happy New Year! It's a great time to celebrate 2007 and look forward to another healthy year filled with fun, fitness, and nutritious food. For many, the new year is a time to set personal goals toward getting healthier. For all of us, a key part of being healthy is eating nutritious foods. A wide variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grain foods, combined with low-fat milk products and lean sources of protein, are important for keeping our bodies at their best.

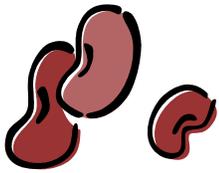
What do plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, all have in common? We need these foods everyday because they provide a variety of important nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, and water, and tend to be low in fat and calories. They are also some of our best sources of fiber. Eating fiber-rich foods has many associated health benefits. To start the year off healthy, and in honor of Fiber Focus Month, let's learn more about fiber and how we can include plenty of it in daily meals and snacks.

Dietary fiber is a type of carbohydrate in plants that our bodies can't break down during digestion. It gives many plants their structure and adds texture to foods. You may have heard about different types of fiber, namely soluble and insoluble. Both are important, and if you eat a variety of nutritious plant foods, you're likely getting some of both. Soluble fibers partially dissolve in water and tend to form a viscous (thick) gel in the gut. These types of fibers can help to lower cholesterol. Foods such as legumes (beans, peas), oatmeal and oat bran, and fruit are all good sources of soluble fiber.

Insoluble fibers ("roughage") don't dissolve in water in the body and tend to have a laxative effect. These fibers help to prevent constipation and promote regular bowel movements. Brans, whole grains, and vegetables are important sources of fiber that promotes regularity. Fibrous foods can also add bulk to meals and snacks, making them seem more satisfying and filling than low-fiber foods.

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Eating a variety of fiber-rich foods can help to prevent and manage chronic conditions, including heart disease, diverticulosis, certain types of cancer, and obesity. It is helpful to remember that the benefits of fiber are in the context of an overall healthy eating pattern. Foods contain a variety of components that can be protective to our health. Fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains are the cornerstones of a healthy diet that are naturally rich in fiber and low in fat and cholesterol.

It is recommended that we get 14 grams of fiber per 1,000 calories eaten each day. For most older people who need about 1,600 to 1,800 calories daily, 22-25 grams of fiber is a good goal. If you are trying to increase your daily fiber intake, do so gradually. This will help to prevent unpleasant digestive side effects, such as gas and bloating. Also, be sure to drink plenty of water when you are increasing the amount of fiber in your diet. The suggestions below give ways to include plenty of fiber-rich foods at meals and snacks:

- **Breakfast:** Whole grain or bran cereals, such as shredded wheat, with sliced banana or other fruit make a fibrous morning meal. Look for cereals with at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. Oatmeal and whole wheat toast are also high fiber breakfast choices.

- **Lunch:** Chili or vegetable soup goes great with a grilled cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread. Salads with dark green lettuce and other vegetables, and fruit, such as an apple or pear with the peel on, make delicious lunch fare.
- **Dinner:** Side dishes can be fiber superstars. Have navy beans, butterbeans, peas, or a baked potato or sweet potato with skin to go with your entrée. Broccoli, squash, turnip or collard greens, and a variety of other colorful vegetables can add fiber to your meal.

For more information, see: 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, chapter 7, at: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/default.htm>, and Position of the American Dietetic Association: Health Implications of Dietary Fiber (2002) at www.eatright.org.

Warm Winter Oatmeal (Serves 1)

Ingredients:

- ½ cup cooked, unsweetened instant oatmeal, prepared with low-fat milk
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon soft margarine
- ¼ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon sugar-free maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons canned pumpkin (optional)

Directions: Mix together oatmeal and remaining ingredients. Enjoy this warming winter treat to start your day the healthy way.