

SENIORS & FIBER – UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

Fiber is the part of fruits, vegetables, beans and peas, seeds, and whole grains that the body cannot digest. Eating the right amount of fiber is key to good health, especially among older adults. As the body ages, people tend to develop more problems with constipation and other digestive conditions.

At CareFocus Companion Services, we care about the health and safety of you and your loved ones. We also understand the confusion and concerns that can come along with beginning a new diet. Using this list of frequently asked questions can help assist in the everyday management of a high fiber diet.



1. How much fiber should be consumed daily?

The recommended fiber intake for people 50 and older is 21 grams per day for women and 30 grams per day for men.³

2. What are the dangers associated with a low-fiber diet?

Constipation and Diverticulosis

3. What is constipation and how can it be prevented?

Constipation arises for a variety of reasons, many of which are especially prevalent in older adults, including:

- ▶ Improperly/incompletely chewed food
- ▶ Decreased fluid intake and dehydration
- ▶ Certain types of medications
- ▶ Inactivity or immobility
- ▶ Conditions such as Parkinson's disease, hypothyroidism, hypokalemia, or stroke
- ▶ Improper nutrition and fiber intake¹

4. What is Diverticulosis and how can it be prevented?

Diverticulosis is present in nearly everyone in America over the age of 80 and about half of those between the ages of 60 and 80. Diverticulosis is strongly associated with low fiber diets because the lack of fiber leads to constipation which may lead to the formation of diverticula.⁴ Additionally, 10-25% of all people with diverticulosis develop an infection or inflammation of diverticula, called diverticulitis.

5. What is the importance of a high fiber diet?

Having enough fiber in your diet will promote regular bowel movements, improve blood sugar levels in diabetics, treat diverticulosis and irritable bowel syndrome, and may help prevent some cancers. In addition, it will add taste, texture, and variety to the diet, while also increasing the feeling of fullness which helps control appetite and weight.³ High fiber foods are low in fat, cholesterol, and calories, which all help to lower the risk of a heart attack or stroke, and reduce obesity.¹

6. How can you ensure you are getting enough fiber?


To ensure you are consuming enough fiber, you need to incorporate high fiber foods such as breads, cereals, pasta made with whole-grain flour, brown rice, all fruits and vegetables, dried beans, leafy vegetables, peas, raisins, and prunes into your diet.⁴ Avoid peeling high fiber fruits and vegetables as the skin and membranes ensure that you get all of the fiber. Reading food labels will also help you determine how much fiber you are getting in your diet.³

7. What makes a food high in fiber or low in fiber?

Foods that contain four grams of fiber or more are high in fiber and foods with two grams of fiber or less are low fiber foods.³

8. Are there any risks to eating too much fiber?

If you consume too much fiber, it can bind minerals such as calcium or zinc, preventing absorption and use by the body, thus leading to deficiencies in these trace minerals.⁶



This information is not meant as a substitute for professional medical or nutritional advice and consultation. When differences exist between the information here and information given to you by your healthcare provider(s), you should follow the advice of your healthcare provider(s). Any additional information or clarification needed should be sought from the Physician, Practitioner, Speech Pathologist, or Nutritionist who is familiar with the individual's health and medical conditions.



SENIORS & FIBER – HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

As we age, changes in our environment and physical abilities can contribute to unique nutritional management issues. Without proper nutrition, the risk of serious health problems increases. Use the list below to find examples of foods to eat and foods to avoid when on a high fiber diet.

Foods to Eat

▶ Fruits

Apples, bananas, grapefruits, berries, nectarines, oranges, peaches, pears⁷

▶ Vegetables

Asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, green beans, peas, potatoes (with skin), spinach and romaine lettuce.⁷

▶ Milk and dairy (2-3 servings a day.)⁷

Low-fat milk and yogurt

▶ Protein

Beans and peas, all nuts and seeds, all meat, poultry, fish, and eggs.⁷

▶ Whole-grains and whole wheat⁷

- ▶ Whole grain bread, muffins, bagels, or pita bread, whole wheat crackers, rye, oatmeal, oat bran, or grits, brown rice, and whole wheat pasta.⁷
- ▶ High-fiber cereals with “bran” or “fiber” in the name.¹

▶ Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day.⁷

▶ Add the following high-fiber foods to meat or soups:⁷

Pinto beans, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, oatmeal, bran

▶ Include healthy snacks

Popcorn, whole-wheat pretzels, cakes and breads made from oatmeal, fruit and nuts.⁷

Foods to Avoid

▶ High fat, high cholesterol, and high calorie foods.¹

- ▶ Switch potato chips out for whole wheat snacks.¹
- ▶ Condiments and toppings that are high in fat.⁷

▶ Foods that are made from white or refined flour.⁸

White rice⁸

▶ Chopping, peeling, processing, puréeing, or cooking may reduce fiber.⁷



¹ Maxim Healthcare Services. Nutrition and Dietary Guide for Supporting Individuals with Nutritional & Mealtime Challenges. February 2008

² Valentina Remig, Assistant Professor of Human Nutrition at Kansas State University. “Elderly Diet and Fiber. Diet-i.com. 11 Feb. 2009. <<http://www.diet-i.com/diet-elderly-people.htm>>

³ Wolfley, Kristie and Williams, Pauline. “Fiber for Seniors.” 11 Feb. 2009. <http://www.aging.ca.gov/aaa/guidance/Nutrition_Best_Practices/Nutrition_Education/senior_fact_fiber.pdf>

⁴ “What Should You Eat If You Have Diverticulosis?” Johns Hopkins Health Alerts. Medletter Associates, LLC. 11 Aug. 2008. 11 Feb. 2009 <http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/alerts/digestive_health/>

⁵ Carter, Ann, MD. “Fiber in Your Diet.” Senior Health Advisor 2007.2. 19 April 2007. McKesson Corporation. 11 Feb. 2009 <www.fairview.org/healthlibrary>

⁶ “Fiber Not Just for Constipation Anymore.” Seniors-site.com. 11 Feb. 2009 <<http://seniors-site.com/nutrition/fiber.html>>

⁷ “High Fiber Diet” Dietsite.com. 4 March 2009 <<http://www.dietsite.com/dt/diets/eatingwell/fiber/highfiber.asp>>

⁸ “Fiber in Your Diet” Healthgoods.com 4 March 2009 <http://www.healthgoods.com/Education/Nutrition_Information/General_Nutrition/fiber_in_diet.htm>

⁹ “Nutritional Guidelines for Senior Citizens”. Seniors-Site. 11 March 2009. <<http://www.seniors-site.com/nutritio/guides.html>>

For more information or to discuss recommendations on healthy eating and necessary care for your loved one, contact CareFocus Companion Services today!


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