

fibre is first-class

Experts say we consume only half the amount of fibre needed for a healthy diet

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G IN OUR EARLY HISTORY as hunter-gatherers, humans are believed to have had diets that included 150 grams of daily fibre.

Today most Western diets barely manage 15 grams of fibre each day.

The health benefits of fibre—the parts of plant foods that bodies can't digest or absorb—are well known, but new research shows there's good reason to increase our intake of roughage.

Yes, our ancestors were on to something.

Researchers have found that good bacteria in our gut has much to do with our behaviour, immune function and metabolism. And to encourage healthy microbial communities, they must be fed their favourite meal of fibre, according to Justin Sonnenburg, a biologist at Stanford University and author of *The Good Gut: Taking control of your weight, your mood and your long term health*.

But most of us aren't getting enough. In fact, experts say we're only getting half the amount of fibre for a healthy diet.

So where can this healthy carbohydrate be found? In vegetables and fruit, whole grains and legumes like peas, lentils, beans, seeds and nuts.

Following Canada's food guide, however, doesn't always ensure adequate fibre intake, according to Richmond registered dietician Sharon Tateishi. She notes it's important for people to pay attention to the variety of food in their diets.

"For example, we tend to assume that salads are great fibre enriching options. But we must be aware of the specific ingredients such as lettuce and other leafy additions. They are not always as fibre

dense as we may assume."

Tateishi's advice? Go for variety.

Kale and cabbage, for example, can double the fibre in a salad over iceberg lettuce. Add in some broccoli, peppers, carrots and corn for more. Step it up a notch with dried fruits, nuts and lentils, and you've got a salad bursting with fibre.

Fibre can help keep you regular, lower cholesterol and control blood sugar. It can also help maintain a healthy body weight and lower your risk of heart disease and some cancers like colon cancer.

Richmond registered dietician Amy Yiu, founder of Richmond-based Libra Nutrition (libranutrition.com) also spoke to *The Good Life* about the benefits of fibre, and how to add more to our diets.

Good Life: It's well known that dietary fibre is good for us. What are some benefits of fibre people might not know?

Amy Yiu: "Not many people are aware that there are two types of fibre—soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fibre helps promote regularity and a healthy digestive system.

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Adding more fibre to your diet can pay off with health benefits.

Increasing your fibre intake

Grains

- Eat at least six servings of whole grain products every day. Examples include rolled oats, barley, brown rice, quinoa and whole wheat breads, breakfast cereals and pasta.
- Use whole grain bread, rolls, pita or bagels when making toast or sandwiches.
- Replace at least half of the white flour with whole-wheat flour in your recipes.
- Add 15-30 ml of bran, ground flax seed or a very high fibre cereal to your cereal in the morning.

Vegetables and Fruit

- Eat at least seven servings of vegetables and fruit every day. Aim for 1-2 servings of fruit and vegetables at every meal and snack.
- Eat the peels of your vegetables and fruits whenever possible.
- Try having fruit as a snack or as a

dessert. Pears, raspberries and blackberries are top choices for fibre. Guava, persimmon and kumquat are exotic high fibre fruits worth trying.

- Eat vegetables and fruit instead of drinking juice.

Legumes

- Add barley, beans, peas or lentils to soups, stews and casseroles. For example, add black beans to spaghetti sauce or lentils to soup.
- Roast chickpeas or steam edamame for an easy snack.
- Use legume-based dips (hummus, baba ghanoush) for veggies instead of sour cream.

Nuts and Seeds

- Add toasted nuts, sesame seeds, sunflower or pumpkin seeds to salads and cereals.

- Sprinkle on pasta dishes and stir-fries.
- Grab a handful of nuts (60 ml) as a quick snack.

Read Food Labels

- Compare products and pick the one with the most fibre. Be sure you are comparing the same serving sizes.
- Check for grams of fibre. High-fibre foods have four or more grams of fibre per serving.
- Look for ingredients such as bran, whole grain whole wheat, oatmeal or rye flour.
- Increase the fibre in your diet slowly to avoid gas, bloating and diarrhea.
- Divide fibre-containing foods throughout the day at both meals and snacks.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

*Source: Dietitians of Canada (www.dietitians.ca)

of food. Eating high fibre foods may help you feel full for a longer time, which helps with appetite and weight control. It also helps:

- lower blood cholesterol levels;
- control blood glucose (sugar) levels;
- manage diarrhea and loose stools;
- reduce some of the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome;
- reduce the risk of getting intestinal ulcers;
- have a healthier colon by increasing the amount of healthy bacteria."

GL: How important does fibre become in our senior years?

AY: "It's quite common for older adults to experience constipation as their digestive systems might not be as strong compared to younger adults. Their physical activities might also decrease due to old age and chronic medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and heart diseases.

"Men and women over the age of 18 should aim for at least 21 to 38 grams of total dietary fibre each day."

GL: What's an easy way to add more fibre to one's diet?

AY: "Some easier ways will be adding foods that are good sources of fibre into one's diet without making major dietary changes. Dried beans and peas, oat products and psyllium are some of the best sources of soluble fibre.

"In addition there are some new healthier food products widely available in the supermarket that could help add significant amount of fibre—both soluble and insoluble. Examples are ground flaxseed, hemp hearts, chia seeds, psyllium, buckwheat, quinoa, barleys and kale chips.

"Of course, one should choose half of his or her grain products (rice, bread, pasta) to be whole grains, and aim to eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables based on Canada's Food Guide."

GL: What common foods should be avoided?

AY: "Most fast foods, processed and highly processed foods. Grains that have been refined and stripped off their outer layers. Foods like white bread, white rice, white



Registered dietitian Amy Yiu says supermarkets now offer healthier food products that can help boost fibre in our diets, including ground flaxseed, hemp hearts and kale chips.

pasta, etc. Also, most gluten free products one can buy at supermarket are often lacking fibre as they are mostly made of tapioca starch, potato starch or rice."

GL: What's the difference between supplements such as Metamucil and fibre found in foods?

AY: "Supplements are mostly just isolated fibre, with some artificial flavours and colourings or artificial sweeteners. That means, they often do not contain any other

nutrients. However, fibre from food sources are not the only nutrients found there.

"In fact, most fibre-rich foods also provide other essential nutrients like complex carbohydrates, protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Their absorption in our bodies might therefore be enhanced with the synergistic effects of other nutrients. In addition, the costs of eating real foods are lower."

Make small changes to boost fibre

Breakfast

- orange juice (0.1g) / small orange (2.3g)
- Cheerios (2.2g) / All Bran (11.8g)
- white toast (0.8g) / whole wheat toast (2.4g)

Lunch

- apple (2.6g) / pear (5g)
- slice of cheddar (0g) / hummus (3.4g)
- white pita (1.3g) / whole wheat pita (4.7g)
- cheeseburger (1.3g) / baked beans (10.3g)

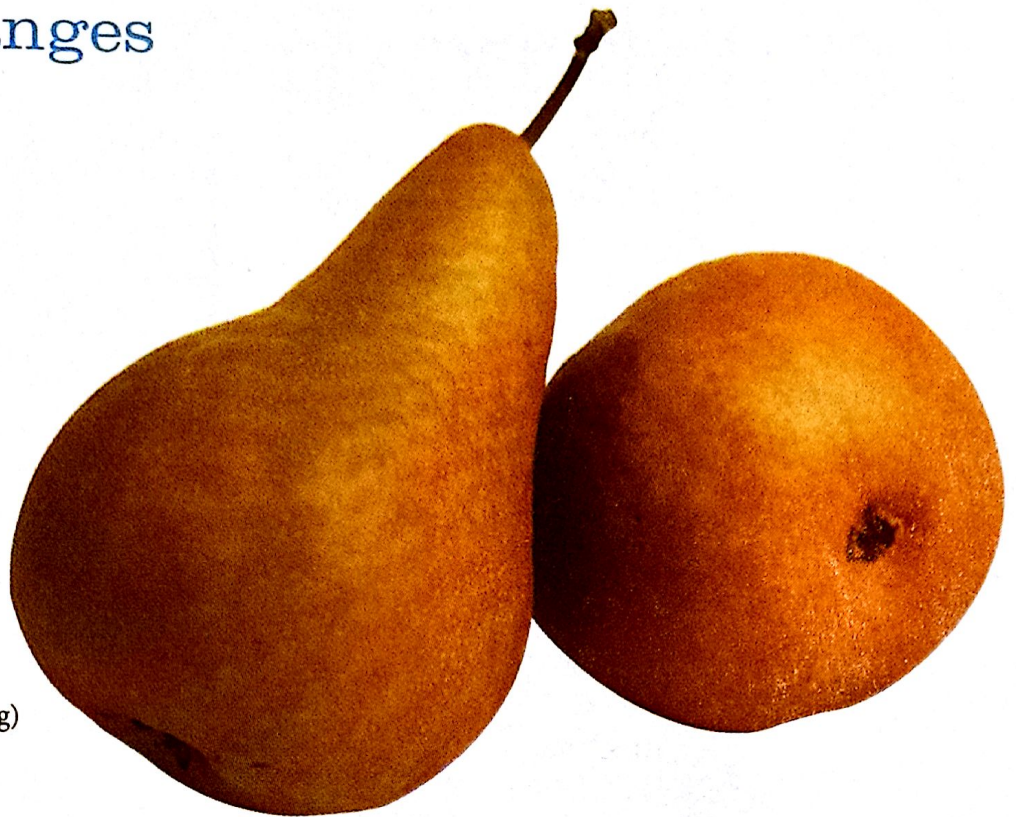
Dinner

- mashed potatoes (2.2g) / baked potato with skin (3.8g)
- spaghetti (2.5g) / whole wheat spaghetti (4.8g)
- cheese pizza (1.5g) / chicken fajita (3.1g)

Dessert

- Fudgesicle (0.9g) / raspberries (4.2g)

**Source: Health Canada's Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods*



Pears have almost twice as much fibre as apples.