



Embrace diet rich in fiber

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By Dan Vierria

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Fiber is today's health super-hero. It's been rediscovered, researched and readdressed in a variety of products and a new diet.

Brenda Watson's latest book, "The Fiber35 Diet" (Free Press, \$26, 303 pages) is the latest push in the fiber movement. She's joined forces with organic-fruit-and-vegetable advocates, the holistic folks, nutritionists and health experts who have embraced high-fiber diets.

"Oranges, foods like Kashi, avocados, walnuts, beans and almonds are all great high-fiber foods," Watson says during a telephone interview. "And one of my favorites is almond butter."

Watson, whom you may have seen recently on PBS pledge-drive programming, specializes in digestive problems. After gaining 30 pounds while going through menopause, she says, she realized that one of the main culprits was a shortage of fiber in her diet.

What exactly is this weight-loss wonder? Fiber is indigestible material in plant foods, according to the National Fiber Council. It's also known as roughage.

Wolfing down a cheeseburger sounds so much more appealing than nibbling sections of orange, but consider this: A medium-size orange has 7 grams of fiber, while Burger King's cheeseburger has only 1 gram.

"I'm not saying you can't have that cheeseburger once a week, but there have to be some lifestyle changes," Watson says.

She recommends no less than 35 grams of fiber per day. More is better.

The minimum recommended daily fiber intake ranges from 25 to 35 grams, depending on the expert or medical association, but Americans average only 10 to 15 grams a day, according to Columbia University's Institute of Human Nutrition.

Those on low-carb diets take in a mere 7 to 8 grams of fiber, reports the Annals of Internal Medicine.

The beauty of fiber is it has no calories, can't be digested and moves quickly through the digestive system. Eating natural fiber is healthier than taking laxatives, and companies such as Kashi of San Diego have responded with a variety of products, including cereals, snack bars, crackers, cookies, even frozen entrees.

Watson co-wrote her latest book with Dr. Leonard Smith, a Miami gastrointestinal and vascular surgeon.

According to the book, fiber:

- Fills you up and suppresses your appetite.
- Allows you to eat high volumes without high calories.

- Slows the body's carbohydrate conversion to sugar, which supports blood glucose stability that helps us lose weight.
- Eliminates calories from food you eat, through waste excretion. Watson calls it "fiber flush."