

# Orlando Sentinel

## **Roughage is ready to help you with weighty tussles: Added fiber can fill you up without filling you out**

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By Darryl E. Owens,

Feb. 6--Like many shoppers, Susan Lincoln studies product labels before she buys. She isn't so much a slave to price as she is a master of choosing meals packed with fiber.

Lincoln folds fiber into her breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, reaping the benefits fiber affords dieters. Given she has shed 60 pounds in her weight-management journey, it's hard to argue with success.

Fiber is touted for its role in cancer prevention and digestive health, but backed by recent studies, dieters increasingly are turning to fiber as a weapon in the battle of the bulge.

"I read labels, and the one thing that I look for on labels is the fiber content," says Lincoln, 42, an Orlando accountant. "I look for foods with high fiber."

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that "normal-weight" people on average consumed more fiber than their obese counterparts.

"Our results indicated that a diet containing more than average amounts of fiber, complex carbohydrates and fruit was associated with normal body fat stores and standard weight for height," wrote lead author Jaimie Davis.

By itself, fiber is no magic bullet. However it is "certainly another weapon in the holster," says Brenda Watson, owner of ReNew Life Formulas in Palm Harbor and co-author of The Fiber35 Diet. "Consuming a diet that includes plenty of natural, high-fiber foods will not only help you lose weight, but it will teach you a lifetime system of optimum nutrition that will help you achieve your weight-loss goal and sustain a healthy body weight for life."

Prevents many things

Dietary fiber is the indigestible chaff of plant foods, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts and seeds. Insoluble fiber, found in whole wheat, whole grains, seeds, vegetable and fruit skins, helps with digestion and elimination. Soluble fiber is present in oats, legumes, barley and some fruits and vegetables.

Studies suggest that a diet high in fiber prevents constipation, can reduce the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and diverticulosis, according to the Harvard Medical School Family Health Guide. Other studies suggest high-fiber diets might inoculate against colon cancer. And psyllium, the fiber component of many mass-market supplements, also helps with lowering cholesterol and moderating blood-glucose levels, says Pat Baird, vice chair National Fiber Council. of the

But for dieters, "the beauty of fiber is it fills you up without filling you out," says Tanya Zuckerbrot, a Miami-based dietitian and author of The F-Factor Diet.

Foods high in fiber typically are low-energy-density foods, meaning they are low in calories, says Tara Gidus, a registered dietitian and owner of Tara Gidus Nutrition Consulting in Orlando. The benefit: "Low-energy-density foods allow dieters to enjoy larger portions and lose weight without being hungry," she says.

For example, two cups of grapes yield 100 calories, while a one-fourth cup of raisins is 100 calories. Because of the higher water content and volume, Gidus says, the grapes will satisfy hunger longer.

That plays into fiber's other benefit: its power to suppress the urge to graze.

"Fiber takes up space in the stomach making us feel fuller longer," says Dr. Sam J. Sugar, a staff physician at the Pritikin Longevity Center & Spa in Aventura. "Fiber actually expands in the stomach, absorbing water to take up even more space."

That might explain the thinness of the "normal-weight" group in the recent study. Its members consumed about 3 grams more of fiber each day than the overweight group. Even so, their total consumption, the study found, was far below the 32 grams of fiber per day recommended by the National Fiber Council. Indeed, a Columbia University survey found that Americans on average managed only 12.5 grams of fiber each day.

Don't overdo things

In the '70s, outdoorsman and natural-diet advocate Euell Gibbons gained fame as a pitchman for Post Grape Nuts in commercials where he noshed on pine trees. Though snapping off some tree bark might provide a quick fibrous snack, experts say there are far tastier ways for people to integrate fiber into their diets.

"There [are] lots of great-tasting foods that have fiber and don't taste like sawdust," says Dr. Steven A. Schnur, founder of South Florida Cardiology Associates, and author of The Reality Diet, which advocates fighting fat with fiber.

For breakfast, one might try Thomas' Light Multi Grain English Muffins, which have 100 calories and 8 grams of fiber, or Kashi's line of cereals that are chock-full of fiber, he says. Sandwiches on light honey wheat bread, or Flatout wraps, which contain 9 grams of fiber, make for a fiber-full lunch. At dinner, work in a small baked or sweet potato, and don't discard the skin, packed with fiber and vitamins and minerals.

But, as in all things nutritional, "moderation is the watchword," says Carol Ann Rinzler, author of Nutrition for Dummies

"If you overdo on fiber, your body will definitely protest -- most commonly with gas diarrhea," says Rinzler. "And if you really overdo it, without taking in enough water, you can end up with an intestinal blockage."

Zuckerbrot agrees it is important to introduce fiber-rich foods slowly, and drink at least eight cups of water daily to prevent constipation.

Though Americans measure progress in McMinutes, dieters shouldn't expect to achieve a Hollywood-thin starlet look overnight. A loss of two pounds a week is a reasonable expectation, Rinzler says.

For her part, Lincoln, who is 5-foot-4, says she is halfway to her goal weight.

Every day, she starts with exercise, and fuels up with Kashi cereal, steel-cut oats or oatmeal for breakfast, maybe a wrap with fiber-filled pita bread for lunch, apples and other fiber-rich fruits for snacks. She caps her day with a sensible dinner, and walking or gardening.

"When you eat your fiber in the morning," Lincoln says, "you tend to stay full during the day. When you stay fuller, you eat less."