

Delicious ways to boost fiber?

By Carolyn O'Neil

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MOST PEOPLE know that the advice to eat your vegetables and choose whole grains has something to do with consuming enough vitamins and minerals. But when you make the move to eat more salads, put veggies on your pizza and choose whole-grain bread for a deli sandwich, you're adding an often overlooked and underappreciated substance to your diet - fiber.

Most fiber comes from plant foods, such as beans, broccoli and oatmeal. It's the part of the plant that your body can't digest, so it essentially comes out the way it goes in, making it calorie-free. There are several kinds of fiber, but the two groups you should make a mental note of are soluble and insoluble. Most high-fiber foods contain a mix, but soluble fiber is the main fiber in barley, oatmeal and fruits such as apples, figs and peaches.

Insoluble fiber is the main fiber in whole-grain breads, brown rice, whole-grain breakfast cereals and vegetables like asparagus, kale and peas.

Why all the fuss about fiber? High-fiber diets help keep you from suffering crazy highs and lows in blood-sugar levels, they help lower cholesterol, prevent constipation and may reduce your risk of some types of cancer.

While your body can't digest fiber, the "good" bacteria that are permanent residents in your intestinal tract feast on all that passes by. The result is a bigger, stronger bacterial force that can help keep your immune system healthy. And in keeping with our theme of a happier body, high-fiber diets slow down digestion, making you feel full longer.

The sad news is that the daily fiber intake for most American adults is less than 15 grams, which is woefully short of the recommended 20 to 35 grams a day. Arguably, it's not that easy to consume that much each day, but it can be done if you know where to find fiber-rich foods.

Here are some places to look:

Lentils (half cup) 8 grams

Raspberries (1 cup) 8 grams

Beans, pinto (half cup) 6 grams

Whole-wheat pasta (1 cup) 6 grams

Dried figs (2) 5 grams

100 percent bran (3/4 cup) 5 grams

Roasted soy nuts (1 ounce) 5 grams

Almonds (1 ounce) 4 grams

Broccoli (1 cup) 4 grams

Brown rice (1 cup) 4 grams

Green peas (half cup) 4 grams

Oatmeal, instant, plain (1 packet) 3 grams

Dried plums (prunes) (quarter cup) 4 grams

Wild rice (1 cup) 3 grams

Banana (1) 3 grams

Carolyn O'Neil is a registered dietitian and co-author of "The Dish on Eating Healthy and Being Fabulous!"