

Fibre – My Favourite F Word



Firstly, what is fibre?

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate that the body cannot completely break down. Fibre cannot be digested or absorbed by the small intestine, so is therefore broken down inside the large intestine by bacteria as a source of food.

The different kinds of fibre

There are two main kinds of fibre: soluble and insoluble. **Soluble fibre** dissolves in water, whereas insoluble fibre does not. Most plants contain a mixture of both soluble and insoluble fibre but in different quantities.

As soluble fibre dissolves, it creates a gel that is digested by bacteria in the large intestine. Soluble fibre may help to reduce blood cholesterol and sugar, with it also helping your body to improve blood glucose control which helps to prevent the risk of diabetes further down the line.

Found in: Beans, peas, lentils, oats, some vegetables like carrots and squash

Insoluble fibre actually attracts water into your intestines, which helps to soften your stool and keep things moving in the bowels. Insoluble fibre helps to promote bowel health and regularity, in addition to supporting insulin sensitivity.

Found in: Wheat bran, whole grains, vegetables and fruit.

What can fibre do and how can we benefit?

A high intake of dietary fibre is associated with significantly lower prevalence rates for cardiovascular disease. Big risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity are also less common in those with high fibre diets.

Other fibre benefits include:

- Supporting healthy blood sugar regulation
- Keeps our bowels moving
- Can help to reduce cholesterol levels
- Lower risk of Type 2 diabetes
- Feeds our gut bacteria, supporting good gut health

Including more fibre in your diet may help with fat loss. A study conducted by the Obesity Society has shown a 3.7% lower risk of gaining fat around the abdomen with a 10g daily increase in soluble fibre.

Can fibre help you lose weight?

When our blood sugar levels fluctuate, we are more likely to reach for energy-dense foods such as chocolate, sweets, pastries etc to pick our energy levels back up. Because fibre contributes to balanced blood sugar levels, we may have less snacking, which over a long period of time can contribute to weight gain.

Because our bodies can not digest fibre itself, it reaches the gut unchanged. Once it's there, specific enzymes in the gut bacteria can digest soluble fibre. The bacteria in the gut ferment this fibre and produce short-chain fatty acids that can actually help to reduce body fat.

*Fibre is the superfood everyone **SHOULD** be talking about. Due to its indigestible quality, it provides us with some amazing health benefits – and that doesn't just mean going to the toilet regularly! The majority of people are not getting enough dietary fibre, mostly due to the over-reliance on processed foods, with the majority of people in the UK only averaging between 16-18g of fibre per day!*

Read on to discover why Fibre is my favourite F word.

About the author

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About WPA

WPA is a specialist not-for-profit health insurer. With a history dating back to 1901 they look after private individuals, families and all businesses from micro enterprises through to blue chip global brands.

Fibre X The Gut

Fibre passes through the digestive system, pushing food along and helping to bulk up our stool and keep bowel movements regular.

The bacteria that reside in the gut actually ferment certain types of fibres called prebiotics, and from this fermentation produce short-chain fatty acids which play a role in reducing inflammation, weight, mood and even immune system function.

A fibre-rich diet can encourage the growth of beneficial bacterial strains such as Bifidobacteria and help to improve gut diversity.

We all know by now that the type, quality and origin of our food shapes our gut microbes, having an effect on their composition and function. Dietary fibres interact directly with our gut microbes, impacting our microbial ecology, host physiology and health.

What is the RDI of fibre?

Adults should be eating 30g of fibre a day, with the average British women eating around 17.2g of fibre daily.

Okay, fibre is great, but how do I get it in my diet?

There are so many easy, simple ways to increase fibre intake into your diet:

Swapping

- White pasta for whole wheat pasta
- Bottled green juice for a green smoothie
- Shop bought granola for homemade muesli with chia seeds
- Apples for Raspberries
- Chicken soup for veggie bean chilli
- Sprinkle seeds onto your porridge or salads
- Always eat the skins of your fruit and vegetables

Add in

- Artichokes
- Butternut squash
- Peas
- Edamame beans
- Brussel sprouts
- Chickpeas
- Chia seeds
- Avocado
- Berries
- Pears
- Oat bran
- Flax seeds
- Humous
- Nut butter

Can we supplement our way with fibre?

In an ideal world, we would get all the fibre we need from our food intake. As a first step approach, I tell my clients to increase their insoluble fibre intake to help with constipation and regular bowel movements.

Fibre supplements can help those who suffer from constipation, and many of them are made with only natural ingredients, which I definitely prefer over the ones that are based on laxatives.

However, be aware that excessive use of these supplements can cause symptoms such as gas and stomach pain.

How to get fibre in without triggering bloating?

Start low and slow. Start introducing fibre slowly, and let your body get used to the increased fibre load in small amounts, rather than all at once.

As your digestive system starts to adjust, keep in mind that soluble fibre from foods such as nuts, seeds, beans and fruit can promote more gas formation than insoluble fibre foods such as grains and vegetables.

To conclude

If the long list of fibre benefits above isn't enough, fibre can also help support with sleep, increased energy levels and clearer skin. Adding fibre to your diet and adopting some of the above strategies could help increase your daily intake to reap the benefits fibre has to offer.