

Can dietary fiber help me lose weight?



Want to lose weight but do not know where to start? Looking for something, which can give you long term or sustainable weight loss results? Are you tired of with fad diets, calorie counting or staying unrealistically hungry? Then there is a good news, you can lose weight while eating healthy, nutritious food and without staying hungry. A regular diet high in fiber-rich food is better for losing weight and keeping it off than complex diets or calorie counting. Not only it helps in losing weight, but it also makes you healthier, energetic and reduces the risk of several diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cholesterol etc.

What is fiber?

Dietary fiber, also known as roughage or bulk, is present only in plant foods so there is no fiber in animal products such as milk, eggs, meat, poultry, and fish. Most of the fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains are rich in fiber, but it is mostly concentrated in the skin, seeds, and membranes. That means an apple with the skin has more fiber than a peeled one. Whole grains such as oats, brown rice, and wheat bran have more fiber than processed or refined food like white rice, white bread, pasta etc.

How Does It Help With Weight Loss?

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate found in most of our food. Our body uses (digest) carbohydrates and give us sugar (calories), which, we use for doing various activities like walking sitting, cooking etc., and excess of it, which we cannot use, is stored as a fat. Though most carbohydrates are converted into sugar, *fiber* cannot convert into sugar. Instead, it passes through our intestine undigested without adding extra calories. However, it gives us several good vitamins, minerals that help our body to stay healthy. It helps in weight loss through various ways.

- First, it takes longer to chew high fiber foods, so they give your brain time to receive the signal that you are full. It takes a lot longer time to eat a salad full of broccoli, carrots, and lettuce than to eat a doughnut.
- Second, it increases the volume of the food without increasing calories; make us feel full sooner for a longer period with less food intake.
- Finally, yet importantly, fiber takes a long time to digest than refined carbohydrates. This is because refined carbs are high in sugar, which makes them easier for the body to digest. Fiber helps in regulating the body's use of sugar and prevents blood sugar from rising, then falling, too quickly. Our body is triggered to eat or feel hungry when blood sugars begin to fall; Better control of blood sugar can keep hunger at bay and prevents overeating³. For example eating a boiled corn as a snack instead of chips, or eating a fruit instead of juice, will reduce calories and make you feel more satisfied with the food. It is unlikely that you munch on unhealthy snacks afterward. Therefore, fiber helps in weight loss by making you feel fuller for a long time with fewer calories⁴.

Refined carbs like white flour, white rice, pasta, white bread, doughnuts, cakes, pastries, sweets, biscuits, candies, pie etc., does not contain fiber and necessary nutrients required for good health. They often have high levels of added sugar, fat or salt. Eating refined cereals cause a sharp rise in blood sugars that is not good for health and one of the main reason for weight gain. Despite the fact that they are tasty and are delightful to consume, they are low in nutrition.

How much fiber do you need?

An easy and effective way to reduce food intake without staying hungry to maintain or lose weight is to increase fiber in the diet. By simply shifting towards the plant, based foods and reducing processed food.

You can easily meet your daily requirement by including a 5-6 ounce of whole-grains (1-ounce =size of 1/2 baseball) per day and at least one serving in every meal. Include a 3-4 serving of colorful fruits and 3-4 serving of a variety of vegetables especially green leafy vegetable per day (one serving=size of a small fist) and by replacing red meat with beans or legumes twice or thrice in a week.

Normal weight people eat more fiber rich food than overweight or obese do. Overweight or obese people generally eat larger portion from fat and a lesser portion from complex carbohydrate, especially dietary fiber⁵. Currently, Americans eat only half of the recommended dose of fiber, so they are missing out weight benefit and are also at risk of several diseases⁶.

Good sources of dietary fiber:

Fruits: especially those with the edible skin, and seeds, for example, apple, berries, pomegranate. They also contain vitamin A, C etc., good for eyes and skin.



Whole grains. Include good quality, fibrous grains. They are a rich source of many nutrients; provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories, and keep your digestive system work smoothly.

Vegetables: Eating leafy greens is a great way to increase the volume of your meals, without increasing the calories. They are loaded with many nutrients like potassium, iron, calcium, folate etc., protect from heart disease, and reduces the risk of cancers, fight harmful radicals.

Beans and legumes: High in protein and fiber. Fill us full for a longer time and hence beneficial for weight loss.

Nuts & Seeds: Walnuts and almonds are a good source of fiber and healthy fat, the only handful of them are enough for good health. Rich in vitamin E, antioxidant(protect our cells from damage), helps in increasing memory.

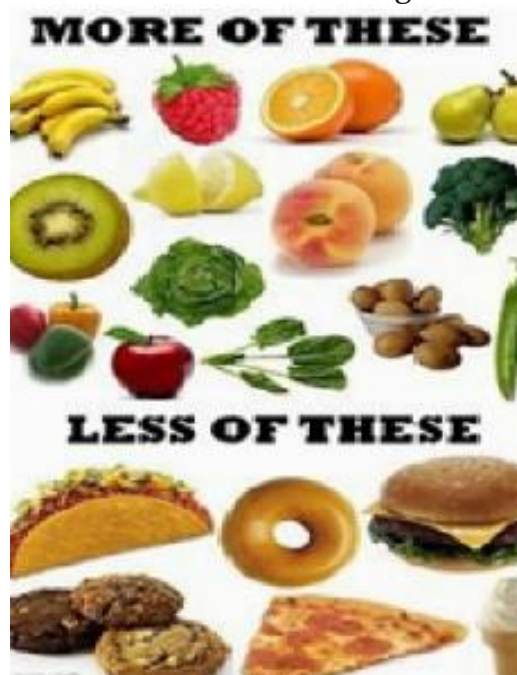
Supplements: Good or Bad?

It is best to get fiber from food rather than from supplements. Fiber supplements do not offer the same benefits that dietary fibers do. *The synergy* of all the nutrients in foods provides the best benefits. The supplement will not make up for the poor diet high in sugar and fat. However, supplements might help if getting enough fiber from the diet is difficult, especially in the case of constipation or health related problems.

What can you do to increase fiber?

It is very easy to increase fiber in your diet, it is present in most of our food and does not require much preparation time, just little bit of planning would help.

- For breakfast, choose cereals that have a whole grain as their first ingredient.



- Include more of oats, muesli, whole wheat bread, pasta, spaghetti, brown rice etc.
- Use wheat flour for baking and cooking. Add oatmeal to cookies, load homemade muffins with raisins, berries, or bananas.
- Sprinkle flaxseeds, chia seeds over a salad, soup, breakfast cereals and yogurt.
- Add kidney beans, garbanzos, and peas, lentils into salads, soups, and casseroles.
- Snack on raw vegetables and high-fiber fruits with skin such as apple, berries, pears etc. instead of chips, crackers, or chocolate bars.
- Eat whole fruit than fruit juice or canned fruit. Whole fruit contains more fiber.

Word of Caution

If you are eating a very low-fiber diet than increasing your fiber intake gradually rather than suddenly; too, much fiber too soon can cause a bloated feeling and increased gas. Water intake should increase to about eight glasses a day, to move fiber through the

digestive system, and that helps against hunger too. Fluids can be in any form, such as beverages, soups, juices and plain water. Water also contributes to feelings of fullness and controls thirst, which can often be confused with hunger. Without extra fluid, the extra fiber is likely to cause the problem of constipation.

Take Home Message:

Fiber is a good natural way of helping to reduce body weight. It does not metabolize fat quicker, but it will help by decreasing the intake of calories. Modest increase in intake of fruits, vegetables, beans, whole and high fiber cereal would easily meet the requirement of fiber. Replacing most of the refined food with high fiber food would give added advantage. That will not only make you feel good and energetic but prevent many health risks.