

## Getting Regular: Understanding Fiber

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### WHAT IS FIBER?

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that comes from a plant origin that cannot be broken down by the usual digestive functions. Dietary fiber is the left over material after normal digestive activity that is not absorbable. It stays in the digestive tract to be eliminated in stool. Eating fiber helps you feel more full.

### WHAT IS SOLUBLE AND INSOLUBLE FIBER?

**Soluble fibers** absorb water and form a gel in the digestive tract. This gel slows down digestion and allows increased absorption of nutrients. Soluble fiber also binds cholesterol, bile salts and sugars to lower cholesterol and regulate blood sugar. Soluble fiber is also a food source for healthy gut bacteria.

**Insoluble fiber** does not absorb water and is responsible for increasing stool bulk and stimulating digestive movement. This decreases the amount of time material is in the digestive tract. Insoluble fiber also dilutes toxins within the intestines.

### WHAT ARE GOOD SOURCES OF FIBER?

Soluble fibers are found mostly in fruits and vegetables as pectins. Soluble fibers are also found in oat bran, flax and legumes (beans).

Insoluble fibers are made of cellulose and hemicellulose, which are the structural components of plant based foods. Psyllium and the bran part of whole grains is the major source of insoluble fibers.

### HOW MUCH DO WE NEED?

In general a person should have up to 40 grams per day of fiber (mixed soluble and insoluble). More than 40 grams may upset the colon and it is good idea to increase to that amount slowly. Also be sure to drink lots of water when introducing fiber to your diet. There can also be an issue with eating too much fiber as it may decrease the absorption of minerals. Therefore, do not take supplements with fiber.