

Fiber: It's important to your child's diet, too

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Just like adults, children need lots of fiber in their diets.

Fiber is part of what fuels a child's normal growth and development. It

helps them feel full longer, controls blood sugar levels, reduces cholesterol and promotes regular bowel movements, according to Children's Health of Orange County, Calif. (CHOC).

"We see improvements in disease management like diabetes with lower spikes in blood sugar after meals when [fiber intake](#) is adequate. Improved satisfaction and satiety from the [food](#) we are consuming is evident when they contain more fiber, and this ultimately impacts weight management," said Stephanie Di Figlia-Peck, nutrition coordinator at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New York City.

A child who is still hungry will continue to eat, she said, so "a filling, satisfying, higher fiber meal will end the eating episode sooner."

However, most American children aren't getting enough fiber in their diet. A recent study in the journal *BMC Pediatrics* found that few young children were getting the recommended amount of fiber in their diet. Those who got more fiber tended to eat more [whole grains](#), fruits, vegetables, nut butter and legumes, along with fewer fats.

"Fiber tends to be the misunderstood, scarcely present dietary constituent that eludes many. This is especially true for today's youth who eat more processed, and ultra-processed, foods than generations of the past," Di Figlia-Peck noted.

Foods are stripped of their natural dietary fibers as they are transformed into packaged items with innumerable ingredients, combined to manufacture convenient, doctored versions of the foods they once were, she said.

"Many high-fiber items contain prebiotics that fuel the [gut microbiome](#), facilitating a winning partnership as undigestible plant components from dietary fibers, like inulin, chicory root and resistant starch, provide a [fuel](#)

[source](#) for the abundant, vitally important network of bacteria and organisms that modulate health, impact disease risk and enhance well-being," Di Figlia-Peck said.

These microbiome benefits are important for all ages and it is never too early to start eating more fiber, she said.

How much fiber do kids need?

Children ages 1 to 3 need about 14 grams of fiber a day, children ages 4 to 8 need about 16-20 grams, kids ages 9 to 13 need about 22-25 grams and those ages 14 to 18 need about 25-31 grams, CHOC says.

It can be difficult to know how much fiber is in foods by reading the package label, Di Figlia-Peck said.

"Food labels are inherently confusing when the wording on packaging fails to match numbers on the nutrition facts panel," she said.

A common example encountered on cereal packaging may highlight "made with 12 grams of whole grains," yet the label reflects a mere 1 or 2 grams of fiber in the box.

High-fiber foods for kids

Fiber-rich foods for kids include fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

There's lots of fiber in grains like oatmeal, brown rice, whole wheat pasta and air-popped popcorn. Fiber-rich legumes include kidney beans, lentils and black beans. Edamame (soybeans) and almonds are also fiber-rich, according to CHOC.

Vegetables rich in fiber include broccoli, avocado and jicama. Fruits like raspberries, blackberries, pears, oranges, bananas and apples are also rich in fiber.

One large pear with skin has 7 grams of fiber, one cup of fresh raspberries has 8 grams of fiber, half of a medium avocado has 5 grams of fiber, 1 ounce of almonds has 3.5 grams of fiber, half a cup of cooked black beans has 7.5 grams of fiber, 3 cups air-popped popcorn has 3.6 grams of fiber, and 2 tablespoons of chia seeds have 10 grams of fiber, Di Figlia-Peck said.

Some less well-known fiber powerhouses include dark chocolate (70% or higher) and apples. "Dietary fiber intakes are best tolerated with adequate hydration and a gradual introduction and increase in fiber sources," she noted.

For even more fiber-rich foods see the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#).

Getting fiber into your kid's diet

"Making food fun and enjoyable improves acceptance, and theme nights can be a fun way to entice children and adolescents with catchy names and wordplay," Di Figlia-Peck said. "Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday and Salad-Bar Saturday are all the craze."

Here are more tips to increase the amount of fiber in your child's diet:

- Leave the skins on fruits and vegetables
- Use whole wheat flour
- Replace [white bread](#) and cereals with whole grains
- Add fruit to whole-grain cold or hot cereals
- Add fruit, nuts or whole-grain granola to yogurt
- Add vegetables to scrambled eggs, omelets or pasta

- Aim to offer whole grains that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving
- Choose whole fruit instead of juice
- Include fruit and vegetables with every meal
- Put veggies, like lettuce, tomato or avocado on sandwiches
- Add beans to soups and salads
- Add bran to baked goods
- For snacks, offer air-popped popcorn, whole-grain crackers, fruit or vegetables.

"Enormous potential exists to shape habits and make eating high-fiber foods the norm, not the exception, with family-based meal planning," Di Figlia-Peck said. "Families have a multitude of options to utilize plant-based sources to create high-fiber versions of common delicacies."

More information: Kristen Finn et al, Nutrient intakes and sources of fiber among children with low and high dietary fiber intake: the 2016 feeding infants and toddlers study (FITS), a cross-sectional survey, *BMC Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s12887-019-1822-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-019-1822-y)

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