

High-fiber diet helps heart too, expert says

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Learn to read food labels closely, he advises.

(HealthDay)—Eating a high-fiber diet does more than promote digestive well-being; it's also good for your heart, an expert says.

Dietary fiber from fruits, vegetables, [whole grains](#) and beans "has been shown in research to help lower cholesterol," Jody Gilchrist, a nurse practitioner at the Heart and Vascular Clinic at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, said in a university news release.

"Most nutrition experts say that a person needs at least 25 grams of fiber a day as part of a balanced diet," Gilchrist said. "The [American Heart Association](#) recommends that a good rule of thumb is 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories consumed, and at least 10 grams should come from soluble fiber."

Soluble fiber makes you feel full quickly, which helps control how much you eat. Research has shown that soluble fiber also helps lower "bad"

LDL cholesterol by interfering with how the body absorbs cholesterol from foods.

Foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, oatmeal, beans, peas, rice, bran, barley, citrus fruits, strawberries and apple pulp, Gilchrist said.

Insoluble fiber adds bulk to the diet, helps prevent constipation and is the fiber that does the most to keep your digestive tract healthy. Foods high in insoluble fiber include whole-wheat breads, most whole grains, cabbage, beets, carrots, turnips, cauliflower and apple skin.

When buying groceries, read nutrition labels carefully, Gilchrist said. Many items that list oat or wheat bran as ingredients, such as muffins and waffles, actually contain very little bran and can have high amounts of sugar, sodium or fat.

"If you are buying something packaged and not a raw food, such as fruits or vegetables, look for the American Heart Association Whole Grain heart check mark on labels," Gilchrist said. "It's a good way to make sure what you are getting is good for your heart."

Another way to boost your fiber intake is to add fiber supplements to coffee, yogurt, cereal, soups and other foods. Just be sure to increase your fiber intake slowly and drink plenty of water, Gilchrist said.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about fiber.

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