



Barley and fiber

We've all heard it: Eat more fiber. Health and nutrition professionals recommend eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, due in part to the healthful high-fiber nature of these foods. So what is fiber? What exactly does it do to promote good health? How can you incorporate fiber into your family favorites? Read on for all the answers.

What is fiber?

Fiber is a substance that's only found in plants. It cannot be digested or absorbed by the human body. The type of fiber that we eat is called dietary fiber. There are two main types of dietary fiber, soluble and insoluble. Both are important for good health.

What's the difference between soluble and insoluble fiber?

The main difference between the two is how they move through the digestive tract. Insoluble fiber, also known as roughage, does not dissolve in water and moves more quickly through the digestive tract. Soluble fiber, on the other hand, mixes with liquid and binds to fatty substances to help remove them from the body. It's important to eat foods that contain both types of fiber every day.

What are the health benefits of soluble and insoluble fiber?

Studies show that soluble fiber (including barley clinical research on soluble fiber) is effective in lowering blood cholesterol, a risk factor for heart disease. Soluble fiber has also been shown to be beneficial in slowing the absorption of sugar, which, for people with diabetes, may help decrease the need for insulin. Soluble fiber may also help reduce the risk of developing type 2 or non-insulin-dependent diabetes. Studies show that insoluble fiber may be beneficial in lowering the risk of disorders such as hemorrhoids irritable bowel syndrome and certain cancers such as colon cancer. Insoluble fiber is the type of fiber that helps the human body maintain more "regular" bowel function.

Can dietary fiber help control weight?

Eating a high-fiber diet may be beneficial in weight control as well. High-fiber foods generally require more chewing time, which gives the body more time to

register that it's no longer hungry. This in turn may lessen the likelihood of overeating.

How much dietary fiber should I eat?

Health and nutrition professionals, as well as health organizations such as the American Heart Association, the American Dietetics Association and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommend eating 25 to 38 grams of dietary fiber every day.

What are some good sources of dietary fiber?

Good choices include grains such as barley, legumes such as split peas and lentils, fruits and vegetables.

How does barley compare?

Barley is a great choice when it comes to adding fiber to the diet. This wholesome grain contains both soluble and insoluble fiber. Compared to other typical grains, barley is a standout. A ½-cup serving of cooked pearl barley contains 3 grams of total dietary fiber. A ½-cup serving of cooked long-grain brown rice contains 1.75 grams of total dietary fiber. And a ½-cup serving of cooked white medium-grain rice contains less than 1 gram of fiber.

How can I easily incorporate more fiber into my family meals?

For interesting variety, try adding a few vegetarian meals to your weekly dining repertoire. Entrees that use grains such as pearl barley, dry beans, lentils and vegetables are both economical and provide plenty of healthful fiber. For some delicious ideas visit www.barleyfoods.org and click on the Recipes tab.