

This Telability handout will provide guidelines for how much fiber children should take in each day and offers suggestions on how to increase fiber in their diet

Why is Fiber Important?

Fiber is a substance found only in plants, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains. It's an important part of our daily diet because it helps keep us "regular" and prevents constipation. Children with special health care needs often need extra fiber in their diets because limited movement, decreased muscle tone, difficulty in drinking enough fluids, medication side effects, and a restricted diet can all cause constipation.

Besides helping a child have normal bowel movements, fiber has also been found to play a role in helping protect against certain diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

How Much Fiber Does a Child Need Each Day?

An easy rule of thumb for children ages 3 to 18 is to add "5" to their age in years-so if a child is 7 years old, they need *at least* (7+5=) 12 grams of fiber each day.

A child this old who has chronic constipation will likely need to take in more fiber in the range of 15-25 grams per day with an "upper limit" maximum of 35 grams per day.

What Else Should I know?

- *It is VERY IMPORTANT to take in enough liquids when eating a diet high in fiber.* Otherwise the constipation could become worse!
- Also remember to increase the amount of fiber in the diet slowly so your child doesn't develop a crampy, bloated stomach.

Fiber Boosters in the Diet

Instead of..

½ cup applesauce (1.5 grams fiber) --→→→

3 pancakes (1.4 grams fiber) →→→

1 waffle (1 gram fiber) →→→

1 cup Team Cheerios (1 gram fiber) →→→

1 cup Frosted Flakes (< 1 gram fiber) →→→

Try this !

1 medium apple (3 grams fiber)

Aunt Jemima buckwheat pancakes (5 grams fiber)

1 NutriGrain waffle (3 grams)

1 cup Multigrain Cheerios (3 grams)

1 cup Wheaties (3 grams)

Fiber Boosters (continued)

Instead of..

¾ cup Captain Crunch (.8 grams fiber) →→→

1 slice white bread (1 gram fiber) →→→

Taco Bell chili cheese burrito →→→
(5 grams fiber)

1 cup white rice (1 gram fiber) →→→

½ cup green beans (1 gram fiber) →→→

Doughnut (0 grams) →→→

Try this !

¾ cup Quaker Crunchy Corn Bran (5 grams)

1 slice whole-wheat bread (2-3 grams)

Taco Bell bean burrito (13 grams)

1 cup brown rice (3 grams)

½ cup green peas (3 grams)

Bran Muffin (4 grams)

Most of the above foods can be ground or chopped if your child has difficulty chewing and swallowing some of the textures above.

Other High Fiber Ideas

- ✓ Prunes are an excellent source of fiber. Try to cut them into tiny pieces and mix into yogurt, cookies, muffins, cereal or pancake mix. They can also be pureed (and can be purchased this way as well).
- ✓ Try “old fashioned” oatmeal (not the instant kind). You can mix in recipes or make homemade oatmeal raisin cookies.
- ✓ Add processed bran to cereal, peanut butter, applesauce, casseroles and ground meats-aim for a goal of 1-2 Tablespoons each day
- ✓ Whenever possible, pick whole grain breads, pastas, and rice over their white counterparts.
- ✓ Choose vegetables with higher fiber content such as peas, corn, potatoes, broccoli, spinach, dried beans (for dips, soups, burritos etc). Aim for at least 3 servings per day (1 serving =1/4 cup for young children)
- ✓ Examples of fruits with higher fiber content include prunes, apricots, plums, raisins, cantaloupe, blueberries, apples (with skin). Goal for day is 2-3 servings per day (1/2 cup or 1 small piece)

More Fiber Facts

Other fiber options are also available. Many products designed for tube-feeding contain fiber, or there are many fiber supplements (such as Benfiber, Metamucil, Unifiber etc) that could be added to your child's daily regimen. Talk with your doctor about which of these options would be most beneficial.

For more information on fiber-containing foods, contact the author of this handout, Sharon Wallace, RD, CSP, CSND at sharonwallace@nc.rr.com or your local pediatric nutritionist.

References and Resources

Nutrition Interventions for Children with Special Health Care Needs. WSDOH-CSHCN Program / Publication # 961-158.

Swinney, B. *Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids*. Meadowbrook Press 1999. (Fiber boosters table is from this reference)

Ward E. *Healthy Foods, Healthy Kids*. Adams Media Corporation, MA, 2002.

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