

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Daily Fiber Intake is Important”

Fiber is an essential part of a healthful diet, and most Americans do not meet the recommended daily guidelines. Meeting the daily recommended intake of fiber can provide many health benefits. High-fiber foods are an essential part of a healthful weight loss diet. It is important to consume the right amount of fiber each day, spread throughout the day. A less common problem is when a person eats too much fiber too quickly, which can cause digestive problems. Fiber is the carbohydrate component of plant-based foods that is not digested or absorbed as it moves through the intestine. The current Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend the following approximate daily intake: men require about 34 grams (g) depending on their age and women require about 28 g depending on their age. Eating more than 70g per day is not advised and can have adverse effects. When increasing the amount of fiber in the diet, it is best to start slowly, increasing it gradually to allow the digestive system time to get used to it. According to a new review commissioned by the World Health Organization (WHO), eating more dietary fiber and whole grains protects against noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer. For every 15 g increase in daily consumption of whole grains, total deaths and the incidence of CHD, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer decreased by 2% to 19%. Researchers found that eating at least 25 g to 29 g of dietary fiber a day yielded significant health benefits, decreasing both total deaths and the incidence of CHD, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer, as well as mortality. Other "important" outcomes comprised cardiovascular disease (CVD) incidence and mortality, and the incidence of adiposity-related cancers, including breast, endometrial, esophageal, and prostate. Experts have increased confidence that the relation between high fiber and whole grain intake and reduced noncommunicable disease are likely causal and not a consequence of confounding variables. There was a 15% to 31% reduction in the risk for all-cause mortality and CVD-related mortality for those who ate the highest quantity of fiber, compared with those who ate the least. For every 8 g increase in dietary fiber consumed daily, total deaths and incidents of CHD, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer decreased by 5% to 17%. The greatest benefits in fiber consumption were observed in individuals consuming 25 g to 29 g per day. Nutrition guidelines issued by governments and professional organizations encourage increased consumption of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Sugars, starches, and fibers are all carbohydrates that perform different roles in the body.

In the America that I love, enjoy your fiber intake with whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

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