

## **The Importance of Fiber**

*by Dr. Cathy Wendland-Colby*

Did you know that the average American consumes approximately five to eight grams of fiber per day? Most people get their fiber from bran muffins, fruits and vegetables. Care to take a guess how many grams of fiber a typical adult should consume? Twenty-five to thirty-five grams per day. That's right – four to five times more than the average person already consumes.

March is National Colorectal Awareness Month. There is no better way to protect yourself from colorectal diseases than to ensure that you get enough fiber each day.

Your body is designed with specific reflexes that are subconscious, innate abilities. That means you were born with these reflexes, you did not have to learn them. The most recognizable example of a reflex is your Patellar Tendon Reflex, the knee jerk reaction. When performing an exam on a patient, I would tap on their Patellar Tendon, which is the tendon that crosses over your kneecap and attaches into your quadriceps, or thigh, muscle. Tapping on this tendon causes a slight stretch of the tendon and muscle, reflexively causing your quadriceps muscle to contract. That's how you get the knee jerk reaction.

Another very important reflex your body possesses is the Gastronomic Reflex, which works in a similar fashion. When you eat, food passes through the stomach into the intestines. This new food actually causes a slight stretch of the intestinal walls, reflexively causing the intestinal walls to contract and push any old food out of your body. In a properly functioning digestive system, you would feel the need to go to the bathroom shortly after every meal.

The easiest way to tell if you are not eating enough fiber is the absence of this reflex. Without enough fiber, the Gastronomic Reflex may cause the food in your intestinal tract to become compacted, rather than be pushed out. Early signs of insufficient fiber include painful or hard stools, constipation, and more than 24 hours passing without a bowel movement. This situation more often than not can lead to diverticulosis or diverticulitis. With diverticulosis, the intestinal tract is so full and compacted, that the digested food begins to push out against the intestinal walls. Diverticulosis is commonly described as a blister on the walls of your intestines. Diverticulitis is when this blister is inflamed because the digested food that is in the blister has begun to irritate your system. Anyone who has ever experienced this pain knows that they must avoid food with any types of seeds that can get lodged in these blisters or out-pockets.

So how does fiber help? There are two main types of fiber – soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber partially dissolves in water. Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water. The insoluble fiber is the type that acts as a Roto-Rooter in your intestines, essentially pushing all of the old food out. When you eat enough insoluble fiber, and drink enough water, the digestive system will begin working better and your body will start to push out

the old food in order to make room for the new food you have just eaten. You will notice that your stomach will look and feel flatter, you will not feel as bloated as you may have, and you will start having normal, regular bowel movements.

Soluble fiber has its own benefits; this is the type of fiber that is absorbed from the digestive tract into the bloodstream. The job of the soluble fiber in your bloodstream is to act as a Roto-Rooter for your blood vessels, removing cholesterol, fats and plaque from the walls of your arteries and veins. When you consume enough of the soluble fiber, you should see your cholesterol levels begin to fall, and your blood pressure may return to normal.

For most people, adding a fiber cereal to their morning routine is the easiest and most likely change to stick with. The top two cereals for adding fiber to your diet are Kellogg's All Bran - Bran Buds, which is in a small white box, and General Mills Fiber One, which is in a large orange colored box.

Some other great sources of fiber are as follows:

Soluble

oatmeal / oat bran

apples

pears

strawberries

nuts / seeds / legumes

Insoluble

whole grains

carrots

cucumbers

celery / tomatoes

zucchini

Fiber has many other added benefits and is constantly being studied for its beneficial effects on Heart Disease and Diabetes. We could go on and on about how important fiber is, but for this month, I urge you to gradually increase the amount of fiber you get every day.

Be sure to drink plenty of water and eat nutritious foods every day. Get lots of rest so you can continue your exercise program, and smile - spring will be here before you know it!

*Dr. Wendland-Colby is a Chiropractor in private practice with her husband at Colby Family Chiropractic on Highway 92 in Woodstock, specializing in sports and family care. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Nutrition and Doctorate in Chiropractic from Life University, where she graduated Magna Cum Laude as the Salutatorian. With over 17 years of experience in the Health and Fitness Industries, she can assist you with most of your health, nutrition and exercise questions. Dr. Wendland-Colby can be reached at (770) 592-1915 or [www.ColbyChiripractic.com](http://www.ColbyChiripractic.com).*