



FROM OPTIMISING GUT HEALTH TO REDUCING THE RISK OF CHRONIC DISEASE, DIETARY FIBRE IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR WELLBEING - BUT MOST AUSTRALIANS AREN'T GETTING ENOUGH. HERE'S HOW TO SNEAK MORE INTO YOUR DIET.

Photography Getty Images *Gut Microbes, January 2024
*The Lancet, Vol 393, February 2019 *Diet, alhw.gov.au, June 2024

It might not be the most fashionable nutrient on the block, but fibre is having a moment, as dietitians and health experts extol its virtues. And unlike many food fads, the health benefits of fibre are backed by decades of scientific research. Naturally found in plant foods including fruit, vegetables, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds, fibre is best known for its role in digestive health, but there's far more to this humble nutrient than keeping your bowel habits regular.

"Fibre has gained attention recently, with emerging research highlighting its extensive benefits beyond digestion, including improving gut health, reducing inflammation, enhancing immune function and even assisting with mental wellbeing*," says Dr Shelley Cavezza, PhD, a functional medicine and nutritional practitioner. Numerous studies also link fibre to weight management, blood sugar regulation and chronic disease reduction, including type two diabetes and cardiovascular disease*.

So, why are so many of us falling short in our fibre intakes? For a start, statistics show that most Australians do not meet the recommended daily serves of wholegrains, fruit and vegetables, and that we eat too much food that's high in energy with low nutritional value†. "Modern diets typically rely on highly processed foods that are low in fibre and essential nutrients, while our busy lives also mean fewer home-cooked meals and lower consumption of whole foods," suggests Dr Cavezza. The good news? By eating more mindfully and making a few simple >

HEALTH MATTERS

swaps, it's easy to boost your fibre intake naturally.

WHAT EXACTLY IS FIBRE?

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate that is only found in plant-based foods. Unlike most carbohydrates which are broken down into glucose and absorbed by the body, fibre passes through the body undigested and does all sorts of helpful things along the way¹. Broadly speaking, there are two types of fibre. "Soluble fibre dissolves in water to form a gel-like substance in the gut, which helps move waste efficiently, supports colon health and helps lower cholesterol," explains naturopath Holly Thompson. "Sources include

oats, psyllium husk, legumes, carrots, sweet potato, flaxseeds and fruits like apples, oranges and grapefruit." Insoluble fibre, on the other hand, absorbs water and promotes regularity by helping food move through the gastrointestinal tract, a process known as gut motility. "Insoluble fibre primarily adds bulk to the stool and includes wheat bran, wholegrain products, brown rice, nuts and seeds, celery, green beans and the skin of root vegetables like carrots," says Holly.

Coles Group dietitian Julia Perruzza adds that, "prebiotic fibre – found in foods such as onion, garlic, asparagus and oats – also deserves a mention". These fermentable fibres act as fuel for the gut microbiome (the good bacteria in our digestive system). Resistant starch², present in legumes and wholegrains, as well as cooked and cooled pasta and potatoes, is also considered a prebiotic fibre.



Myth buster

ONLY ELDERLY PEOPLE NEED FIBRE

Everyone, regardless of age, benefits from adequate fibre intake. "Older adults may actually require slightly less due to reduced calorie needs, but maintaining adequate fibre intake remains essential for health at all life stages," says Dr Cavezza.

Meet the experts



Dr Shelley Cavezza, PhD,
functional medicine and
nutritional practitioner



Holly Thompson,
naturopath



**Julia Perruzza, Coles
Group dietitian**



“[For long-term health goals] consume a variety of fibre-rich foods as an essential component of a balanced diet.”

Dr Shelley Cavezza, PhD

MAXING YOUR HEALTH GOALS WITH FIBRE

If improving digestive health is on your radar, looking at your fibre intake is a good place to start. As well as smoothing the transition of food and helping keep bowel habits regular, fibre supports a diverse and balanced microbiome, which has all sorts of benefits. “There is growing evidence linking the gut microbiome to many other facets of health, including immune function and mental health,” says Julia. “One easy way to support a healthy gut is through consuming prebiotic fibre.” She explains that in a healthy gut, prebiotics are broken down into molecules known as short chain fatty acids (SCFA) which “may reduce the risk of some cancers, inflammation, heart disease, type two diabetes and obesity-”.

Research also shows that eating fibre-rich foods can make it easier to manage body weight. A report on gut health and weight loss by the CSIRO concludes that, although “fibre alone isn’t the solution for weight loss,” it can help control appetite and boost fat loss when combined with a higher protein and low-GI diet. How? “Fibre-rich foods are filling, yet low in calories,” explains Holly. “They’re also digested more slowly so they promote satiety (feeling full), which can mean less snacking.”



Myth buster

FIBRE IS BORING

Definitely not! “Fibre comes from delicious, vibrant foods like berries, sweet potatoes, legumes, nuts and wholegrains. With a little creativity, adding fibre to your meals can be both tasty and satisfying,” says Holly.

What about cholesterol and heart health? “Soluble fibre helps lower cholesterol by binding to it and preventing absorption, thus lowering cardiovascular risk*,” says Dr Cavezza. And because fibre isn’t absorbed by your body, it doesn’t cause the blood sugar spikes you may get with other carbohydrates. By helping to stabilise blood glucose levels, “fibre is crucial for diabetes prevention and management,” she adds. For long-term health goals, Dr Cavezza advises, “don’t think of fibre in isolation, but consume a variety of fibre-rich foods as an essential component of a balanced, wholefood anti-inflammatory diet”.

SO, HOW MUCH FIBRE DO YOU NEED?

Australian dietary guidelines set two different amounts: an ‘adequate intake’ of 25g daily for women and 30g for men. And a ‘suggested intake,’ which is slightly higher at 28g for women and 38g for men. This second amount is recommended for optimal health and to reduce chronic disease risk, but reports >

*The Nutrition Source, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “Journal of Functional Foods, June 2022 - International Journal of Molecular Sciences, May 2022”
 “Gut Health and Weight Loss, CSIRO Report, January 2019” “American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, April 2023” “Diabetes, US Centers for Disease Control” eatforhealth.gov.au



HEALTH MATTERS

fibre intake while ensuring adequate hydration by drinking at least two litres of water each day, she advises. And, of course, if you're considering making significant changes to your diet, consult a health practitioner.

READY TO UP YOUR FIBRE? HERE'S HOW

Increasing your fibre intake is easier than you may think. Try starting the day with oats and jazzing them up with berries, nuts and chia seeds, suggests Holly. "This will also provide protein, healthy fats and various vitamins and minerals." For a fibre-fuelled snack that tastes like a treat, she recommends "popcorn, a handful of nuts or raw veggies with hummus or guacamole".

Julia's top tips? Swap out refined grains like white bread, pasta, crackers and wraps for multigrain or wholegrain varieties. "And incorporate legumes into more meals - try adding ½ cup of lentils into your spaghetti bolognese. You won't even notice them and they'll add extra fibre to your meal." She adds that the skin of apples, pears and potatoes contains valuable fibre that's often discarded, so consider leaving them on and giving them a good rinse.

Remember, too, that fibre is most beneficial as part of a diverse nutrient-rich diet. "Aim for variety, focusing on colourful fruits and vegetables, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds to nourish your microbiome and promote holistic wellbeing," advises Dr Cavezza. >

suggest that less than 20 per cent of Australians are reaching this suggested amount". There's also the matter of quality over quantity, points out Dr Cavezza, advising that "quality fibre from wholefood sources such as vegetables, fruits and wholegrains provides vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and polyphenols that support microbiome diversity and overall health". Additionally, legumes, seeds and nuts are good sources of plant-based proteins and have many other beneficial nutrients. In contrast, Dr Cavezza adds, "poor quality fibre such as isolated (inulin) or synthetic fibres (polydextrose, methylcellulose) which are added to ultra-processed foods like snack bars or processed cereals, may not deliver the same health benefits, and can sometimes cause digestive discomfort."

Can you have too much fibre? While the viral TikTok trend of fibremaxxing - essentially maximising your fibre intake - has raised awareness about fibre's health benefits, moderation is key. "Rapidly increasing fibre or consuming excessive amounts can cause digestive discomfort, bloating and nutrient malabsorption," says Dr Cavezza. Gradually increase your

"Gut Health and Weight Loss, CSIRO Report, January 2019



Myth buster

FIBRE MAKES YOU GASSY AND BLOATED

Because certain fibres are rapidly fermented by gut bacteria, gas can be a by-product for some people, says Dr Cavezza. "This is especially common when fibre intake is increased suddenly, especially for people with conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome." Her tip? "Increasing fibre intake gradually while ensuring adequate hydration can help minimise bloating and improve tolerance over time."














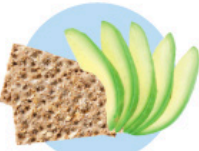




Scan the QR code or visit coles.com.au/highfibrerecipes for a collection of delicious fibre-rich recipes.

The advice in this story is general in nature. Always speak to your healthcare professional before making any changes to your diet.

Easy guide to boosting your *fibre* intake

Coles Group dietitian Julia Perruzza shares simple ways to sneak more fibre into your diet.

IF YOU'RE CRAVING SOMETHING SWEET	IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A SAVOURY SNACK	IF YOU WANT TO ADD MORE FIBRE TO A SALAD	IF YOU WANT TO BOOST YOUR SMOOTHIE
 <p>4g fibre 1 medium apple or pear</p>	 <p>2.5g fibre Roasted fava beans (25g serve)</p>	 <p>4g fibre Use a base of cruciferous veggies like cabbage, brussels sprouts or kale (100g serve)</p>	 <p>6.6g fibre Flaxseeds or chia seeds (20g serve, 1.5 tbsp)</p>
 <p>2.5g fibre 3-4 dried figs, apricots or dates (30g serve)</p>	 <p>2g fibre Lightly salted popcorn (20g serve, 2.5 cups)</p>	 <p>2g fibre Add nuts or seeds (30g serve, small handful)</p>	 <p>5.6g fibre ½ medium avocado for creaminess</p>
 <p>4g fibre ½ cup raspberries</p>	 <p>5g fibre Hummus with veggie sticks (30g serve, ¼ cup)</p>	 <p>4g fibre Add chickpeas (75g serve, ½ cup)</p>	 <p>2g fibre Cashew butter or tahini (20g, 1 x heaped tbsp)</p>
 <p>4.5g fibre 1 slice of high-fibre bread, 1 tbsp peanut butter, ½ banana and honey</p>	 <p>7.5g fibre 2 wholegrain seeded crackers with ½ medium avocado</p>	 <p>2g fibre Use tahini in the dressing, 20g tahini (1 x heaped tbsp)</p>	 <p>6g fibre Handful of mixed berries (150g serve, 1 cup) ^{UK}</p>