

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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**Fiber, Fiber Everywhere!**

With fiber-added products showing up on just about every shelf of the grocery these days, do you feel like you're being tied in knots? Too much fiber, what does it do, why is it there, and what is that stuff anyway? It certainly is one of the hot new ingredients being added to all kinds of foods. There are at least 10 different categories, and many more sources. But they basically boil down to 2 kinds with 2 different, but both good, effects on our health. So here's the simple version of fiber.

A lot of items are advertising fiber for 'digestive health'. That's really broad, but when you read the fine print they are mostly referring to constipation, gas or rumbling tummies. Who knew the food companies were so interested in how often we go to the bathroom! But lots of people buy fiber-containing foods for just that reason.

Now here's the trick. Only 'insoluble' fibers that don't dissolve in water will help with constipation! So fiber supplements that dissolve and leave a clear glass of water or juice won't help. The fibers that help with constipation are Grandmother's old 'roughage'. These are things like oat hulls (the stuff the horses don't want to eat), whole grains, bran, fruits and veggies, and probably the best of all – beans and legumes. Just half a cup of cooked beans has 7 g of the right kind of fiber for this problem. Fiber made from pea hulls and from sugar cane after the sugar has been removed are two of the newer sources for fiber that will probably start showing up in our foods before long. But we can eat beans, peas and lentils now.

The other kind of fiber is 'soluble'. As you'd guess, it does dissolve in water. And when it does it makes the water thick. Metamucil® is probably the soluble fiber source most of us have heard of. Its active ingredient is psyllium, made from a kind of seed. Oatmeal, barley and okra are also excellent sources of soluble fiber.

Psyllium fiber is such a good thickener that it can be a choking hazard. Packages warn consumers to always drink a full glass of water with psyllium powder or crackers made with it. It can thicken the saliva of a child or person with swallowing problems to the point that they can't swallow it. Follow directions!

When soluble fiber arrives in our intestines it thickens the fluids and makes a big soft sponge in there. While the sponge won't help fix constipation, it will do something else very useful. As it gets squeezed through our intestines, it mops up bile acids and ties up sugar. Bile acids are made from cholesterol. Sugar can't get into the blood. Soluble fibers, from psyllium, oats or other sources, help lower our blood cholesterol and keep our sugar low! It's hard to get enough oats or barley into our diet to have a big effect. But psyllium supplements are concentrated so we can get more with them.

Interestingly, inulin or chicory root fiber, the fiber used in a lot of high fiber bars and cereals, doesn't seem to help with either constipation or cholesterol and blood sugar. But there is one other effect of fiber on our bodies. Most kinds of fibers feed good bacteria in our intestines. These bacteria protect us by keeping bad bacteria from growing. They also make certain kinds of fats that keep the walls of our intestines healthy. They use some proteins and take some pressure off our kidneys. Some of them cut down our appetite.

But very few of us get as much fiber as we should. The bare minimum

recommended is only 21 g a day for elderly or children. Healthy, active adults should probably have 30 to 35 g a day. But our national average is barely half of what we need. So start today to look for ways to get more fiber into your diet.

Here's a super simple, super quick, very healthy soup for dinner. Add a salad and some good Italian bread and dinner's ready in no time.

### Easy Bean-y Minestrone

1 16-oz pkg frozen mixed vegetables	1 16-oz can baked beans
1 16-oz can kidney beans	1 16-oz jar spaghetti sauce
1 cup water	½ cup pasta shells or macaroni
1 10 ½ -oz can lower sodium beef broth	hot sauce to taste

Rinse and drain kidney beans. Cook vegetables according to package directions. In large pot combine rest of ingredients with cooked vegetables. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 20 to 30 minutes. Add water if needed. Season to taste with hot sauce if desired. Serves 6.

Adapted from NorthHarvest Bean Growers Assoc.