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*“The Benefits of Dietary Fiber”*

Dietary fiber is a complex carbohydrate form only found in plants. Despite its many health benefits, more than 90% of women and 97% of men in the United States fall short of the recommended daily intake. Over the past several decades, research consistently shows that a diet rich in fiber can significantly reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and colon cancer and promote healthy digestion and regularity. Complex carbohydrates found in plants, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds, are not only rich in fiber but are also packed with essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. These nutrients help protect cells from damage, reduce inflammation, and strengthen the immune system. Because these carbohydrates are digested more slowly, they help maintain steady energy levels and prevent the blood sugar spikes commonly caused by refined or processed foods.

Dr. T. Colin Campbell, a longtime researcher at Cornell University, discovered that individuals with heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and various autoimmune disorders often experience symptom relief when they increase their intake of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, and seeds while reducing solid and added fats, sugars, and refined grains.

Vegetables, fruits, legumes (lentils, peas, and beans), and whole-grain foods provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories compared to other types of foods. Filling your plates with more plants can make managing your appetite and maintaining your body weight easier. Incorporating more fiber into your diet can be simple. Start by making small swaps, such as choosing brown rice instead of white rice, whole fruits instead of fruit juice, air-popped popcorn instead of potato chips, and rolled oats instead of sugary cereals.

According to the USDA MyPlate guidelines, half your plate should consist of fruits and vegetables, and at least half of your grains should be whole grains. Following this simple rule at every meal will help ensure your meals are balanced and nutrient-rich. Daily recommendations suggest that adults consume 2.5 to 4 cups of vegetables, 1.5 to 2.5 cups of fruit, and 6 to 10 ounces of grains, half of which should be whole grains. For children, the recommended intake ranges from 1.5 to 3 cups of vegetables, 1 to 2 cups of fruit, and 5 to 9 ounces of grains, with the same emphasis on whole grains.

Unlike refined carbohydrates, which are typically stripped of fiber and often loaded with added sugars and unhealthy fats, complex carbohydrates provide lasting energy, promote fullness, are nutrient-dense, and are an excellent source of dietary fiber.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.