



# Simple Nutrition Solutions

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## Facts on Fibre by Sally Errey, RNCP, RHN

A healthy gastrointestinal tract is the key to optimal health and energy. It is through this system that nutrients get broken down, absorbed and toxins removed from the body. Strong digestion starts with chewing well, undistracted by stress, and having a stomach that produces acids to break down proteins.

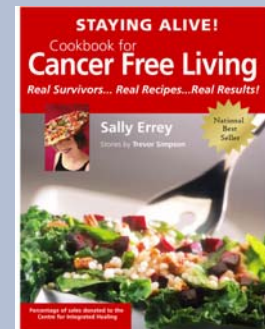
Digested liquids then move on into the small intestine where pancreatic enzymes break down food into the smallest absorbable molecules. The bile duct delivers bile from the gallbladder and fatty acids are emulsified for absorption. As molecules pass down into the lower intestine, they are absorbed into the blood stream, filtered through the liver and move finally to the cells. Any waste matter and undigested fibre has the water extracted from it in the bowel and fecal matter is formed, resulting in 1 to 3 comfortable soft bowel movements each day.

The role of fibre in a healthy system is to bind toxins released by the liver and eliminate them in the feces. Fibre is the part of **plant** foods that can't be digested by humans. It takes two forms, soluble and insoluble. Soluble fibre is soluble in water and acts like a gel (apple pectin used to make jams and "jellies" is a soluble fibre). This has the benefit of regulating the speed of flow through the GI tract and also leads to sustained glucose release, thus regulating insulin levels. Insoluble fibre acts like a soft toothbrush, binding toxins and keeping the intestinal walls clean of accumulated debris.

Fibre reduces the risk of colon cancer, helps reduce cholesterol levels, constipation and regulates the insulin response. Meat, milk, eggs, cheese, and plain yogurt have zero fibre. All plant foods have a portion of soluble and insoluble fibre, because it comes from their rigid cell walls.

Common conditions like gas and bloating, constipation, high cholesterol, diabetes and IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) can all benefit from a plant-based, high fibre diet. Most health practitioners focus on the lower bowel to try and bring relief, recommending probiotics, fibre and more water. I have found more success working from the mouth, right down to the bowel, checking that everything is

### EarthSave 2006 Article



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optimized (chewing, stomach, pancreas, liver and intestines).

For conditions like IBS, where the intestine is highly sensitized and can result in alternating diarrhea, constipation, pain gas and bloating, it is important to reduce insoluble fibre (which can irritate the cells) and increase soluble fibre foods which can soften and form stool and help regulate the system, although it takes time. Herbal blends can also reduce inflammation of the intestinal wall and encourage healing. (Try licorice, slippery elm and aloe vera). Lifestyle and stress must also be addressed as stress has been linked with digestive upsets and IBS and both decaf and regular coffee are known irritants. Rather than using yogurt to replace natural bowel bacteria, I recommend for everyone, miso in soups, salad dressings or spreads, or naturally fermented sauerkraut for those with a stronger digestive systems.

Here's an experiment to show you what fibre looks like in your tummy. Grind 1-2 Tbsp of flax seed and place it in a glass. Add about ¼ cup of water and let it sit. After 5 minutes it will have gelled together. This is what soluble fibre does in your system, and some of the seed fibres that you see will be insoluble and will help clean the GI tract and form stool. Next, use the mix as an egg replacer in a muffin or cake recipe and you'll see how it holds the baked goods together! Then, for the final lesson, as you clean the glass, you'll need to use lots of water - this stuff is sticky! That's why lot's of water is important for us too, to have a happy tummy, we have to keep things moving.

If increasing fibre gives you gas and discomfort, often it is due to the insoluble fibre. This can often be remedied by cooking (applesauce), blending (hummus) and avoiding foods with visible fibres (celery), dense skins, husks and seeds. Many berries are high in insoluble fibre because of their high skin to flesh ratio and seeds that are consumed such as with blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and grapes.

**To find out which foods are high in insoluble fibre, visit the following websites:**

- [http://www.dining.ucla.edu/housing\\_site/dining/SNAC\\_pdf/FactsOfFiber.pdf](http://www.dining.ucla.edu/housing_site/dining/SNAC_pdf/FactsOfFiber.pdf)
- <http://www.hcf-nutrition.org/fiber/fiberchart.html>.