

# Why fibre is important for good health

### WHY THE CURRENT INTEREST IN FIBRE?

The new interest in fibre can be credited to a British physician, Dr. Denis Burkitt. In the 1970's he reported that in countries where the diet is high in fibre there are fewer cases of intestinal cancer, diverticulosis, hemorrhoids, hiatus hernia, appendicitis, varicose veins, gallstones, and heart disease. He felt North Americans had done a disservice to their health by refining much of the fibre from their food.

Here are examples of the prevalence of certain diseases in North America as compared to Africa.

Condition	Prevalence of Disease	
	North America	Africa
Heart Disease	Responsible for 1/3 of all deaths	Practically unknown
Diverticular Disease	Most common disease of the bowel	Almost unknown
Large Bowel Cancer	2nd most frequent cause of cancer	Rare
Obesity	Nearly 1/2 the population is overweight	Rare among those on traditional diets

Are Dr. Burkitt's ideas outrageous? Yes and no. All of his claims cannot be linked solely to fibre. There are many other differences between the eating habits and lifestyle of North Americans and Africans.

On the other hand, current research indicates that there are some health advantages to increasing the amount of fibre in your diet.

### FIBRE AND YOUR HEALTH — SOME PROPOSED THEORIES

#### Heart Disease

Fibre can combine with bile salts, which are made from cholesterol, and prevent them from being absorbed. This forces the body to use up cholesterol in the blood stream to form bile salts. The result is a lower blood cholesterol which may reduce the risk of heart disease.

#### Diverticular Disease

Diverticula are small bulges on the wall of the bowel caused by increased pressure and muscle weakness. Fibre

increases the bulk and softens the texture of the bowel material so the pressure is reduced. The stress on the bowel walls is removed and out-pockets do not occur.

#### Large Bowel Cancer

Fibre helps the waste products move through the gut quickly. The waste products are in contact with the gut wall for a shorter time reducing the risk of irritation, infection, and development of agents which may be cancer-causing.

#### Obesity:

High fibre foods take longer to chew and are bulkier. They cause a full feeling before too many calories are

taken in. Fibre may decrease the absorption of other energy sources (protein and fat).

These are *proposed* theories. It is important *not* to treat fibre as a remedy of an illness. Don't consider fibre a medicine. Instead, recognize it as merely a normal part of the human diet.

**A balanced diet includes many different nutrients and fibre from a variety of food sources.**

#### What is fibre?

It's the part of plant material we can't digest. Since it's not digested, dietary fibre is not a source of nutrients or energy.

#### What does fibre do?

It remains in the intestine as a bulky mass that helps remove the wastes left after the food is digested and absorbed. Like a sponge, fibre takes in large amounts of water. This stretches the intestinal wall which

promotes regularity and good muscle tone. The result — less time for wastes to pass through the gut.

### HOW YOU CAN INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FIBRE IN YOUR DIET

1. Eat more whole grain products everyday — e.g. whole wheat bread and crackers, rye bread and crackers, shredded wheat, bran, oatmeal, brown rice.
2. Eat more fruits and vegetables — unpeeled, whenever possible.
3. Choose fruits more frequently than juice.
4. Use fibre extenders in casseroles — e.g. bran, rolled oats, whole grain cereals.
5. Periodically, substitute dried peas, dried beans and lentils for meat, fish or poultry meals.
6. Eat more nuts, seeds and dried fruit. Try adding them to desserts, salads and casseroles.
7. Substitute whole wheat flour for all or part of the white flour in recipes.

#### For more suggestions...

Lappe, F.M., **Diet For A Small Planet**, Toronto: Ballantine Books of Canada Ltd., 1982, paperback.

Ewald, E.B., **Recipes For A Small Planet**, Toronto: Ballantine Books of Canada Ltd., 1982, paperback.

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