PATIENT GUIDE

High-Fiber Diet

More fiber means softer, more regular bowel movements and a healthier gut. Here is how much you need, the best foods, and how to choose a fiber supplement.

Why fiber helps

- Softens and adds bulk to stool so it passes easily.
- Soluble fiber can ease IBS symptoms and firm up loose stools.
- Lowers cholesterol, steadies blood sugar, and helps you feel full.

How much you need

25–38 g/day

Most adults need **25 to 38 grams of fiber a day**: about 25 g for women and 38 g for men (21 g and 30 g after age 50). Most Americans get only about 15 g.

Start low, go slow

Week 1: Add about 5 grams a day, such as a pear or half a cup of beans.

Each week after: Add another 5 grams until you reach your goal. Going faster usually causes gas, bloating, and cramping.

Every day: Drink plenty of fluids, about 8 cups a day unless we have limited your fluids. Fiber needs water to work.

First 2 to 3 weeks: Some extra gas is normal while your gut adjusts. It usually settles down.

Two kinds of fiber

Soluble fiber: Forms a soft gel; gentle on the gut; Oats, barley, beans, apples, citrus, psyllium; Best choice for IBS and loose stools.

Insoluble fiber: Adds bulk and speeds things along; Wheat bran, whole grains, nuts, vegetable skins; Can worsen bloating in IBS.

How fiber helps hemorrhoids and diverticulosis

Hemorrhoids. Hard stools and straining make hemorrhoids swell and bleed. Fiber keeps stool soft so it passes without straining; in studies, fiber supplements cut bleeding and symptoms roughly in half within about 6 weeks. It also helps anal fissures heal. Don't strain, and limit toilet time to about 5 minutes.

Diverticulosis. Small, hard stools raise pressure in the colon, where small pouches (diverticula) form. Fiber lowers that pressure, and people who eat more fiber have fewer diverticulitis attacks. Nuts, seeds, and popcorn are fine. During a flare, pause high fiber and follow the diverticulitis diet.

A sample day (about 32 grams)

Breakfast: 1 cup oatmeal with ½ cup raspberries and 2 tablespoons ground flaxseed (12 g)

Snack: A handful (1 ounce) of almonds (3.5 g)

Lunch: Sandwich on 2 slices of whole-wheat bread, plus an apple (8.5 g)

Dinner: Fish or chicken with 1 cup brown rice and 1 cup broccoli (8.5 g)

Top high-fiber foods · grams per serving (approximate)

Beans & legumes	
Split peas, cooked 1 cup	**16 g**
Lentils, cooked 1 cup	**15 g**
Black beans, cooked 1 cup	**15 g**
Chickpeas, cooked 1 cup	**12 g**
Baked beans 1 cup	**10 g**

Fruits	
Raspberries 1 cup	**8 g**
Pear, with skin 1 medium	**5.5 g**
Apple, with skin 1 medium	**4.5 g**
Prunes 5 prunes	**3 g**
Banana or orange 1 medium	**3 g**

Vegetables	
Green peas, cooked 1 cup	**9 g**
Avocado ½ fruit	**7 g**
Broccoli, cooked 1 cup	**5 g**
Brussels sprouts, cooked 1 cup	**4.5 g**
Potato or sweet potato, with skin 1 medium	**4 g**

Whole grains	
Whole-wheat pasta, cooked 1 cup	**6 g**
Barley, cooked 1 cup	**6 g**
Bran flakes cereal ¾ cup	**5.5 g**
Oatmeal, cooked 1 cup	**4 g**
Brown rice, cooked 1 cup	**3.5 g**
Popcorn, air-popped 3 cups	**3.5 g**

Nuts & seeds	
Chia seeds 2 tablespoons	**10 g**
Ground flaxseed 2 tablespoons	**4 g**
Almonds 1 ounce (23 nuts)	**3.5 g**
Pistachios 1 ounce	**3 g**

Easy swaps
White bread and rice → whole-wheat bread and brown rice
Juice → whole fruit with the skin
Chips → air-popped popcorn or nuts
Add beans or lentils to soups, salads, and tacos
Sprinkle chia or ground flaxseed on yogurt or cereal

Fiber supplements

If food alone isn't enough, a daily fiber supplement can help. All of these are available over the counter. Generic and store brands work as well as name brands.

Which one should I choose?

Constipation	**psyllium**
IBS with bloating	**psyllium, PHGG, or acacia; avoid inulin**
Lots of gas	**methylcellulose or calcium polycarbophil**
Loose stools	**psyllium**
Prefer a pill	**calcium polycarbophil, methylcellulose caplets, or psyllium capsules**
Dislike texture	**wheat dextrin or PHGG**

How to take a fiber supplement

- Start with **one serving a day** and follow the label. Increase every few days, up to 2 to 3 servings a day if needed.
- Mix powders in **at least 8 ounces of liquid** and drink it right away. Take capsules and caplets with a full glass of water.
- Take other medicines **2 hours before or after** your fiber supplement.
- It may take 1 to 3 weeks to see the full effect.

Comparing fiber supplements

Supplement	Brands	Best for	Good to know
Psyllium Our first choice	Metamucil, Konsyl, and store brands Powder, capsules, wafers	Constipation and IBS; also firms loose stools. The best-studied option, and it can lower cholesterol.	Can cause gas and bloating for the first few weeks. Sugar-free versions contain sweeteners; check the label if you have diabetes or PKU.
Methylcellulose	Citrucel and store brands Powder, caplets	People who get gassy or bloated with psyllium.	Not fermented by gut bacteria, so it causes less gas.
Calcium polycarbophil	FiberCon, Fiber-Lax, and store brands Caplets	People who prefer a pill; low gas.	Contains calcium. Take it 2 hours apart from thyroid medicine and antibiotics such as doxycycline or ciprofloxacin.
Wheat dextrin	Benefiber and store brands Clear, tasteless powder; chewables	Picky drinkers. It dissolves into water, coffee, or soft food without changing the texture.	Gentle, but less evidence for constipation than psyllium. Labeled gluten-free in the U.S.; ask us first if you have celiac disease.
Partially hydrolyzed guar gum (PHGG)	Sunfiber, Regular Girl Clear, tasteless powder	IBS with bloating. It is low-FODMAP and well tolerated.	Mixes clear into any drink.
Acacia fiber	Heather's Tummy Fiber and others Powder	Sensitive stomachs and IBS.	Ferments slowly, so it causes little gas.
Inulin (chicory root)	Fiber Choice; found in many gummies, bars, and "prebiotic" products Chewables, gummies, powder	General fiber boost if you tolerate it.	Ferments quickly and is high-FODMAP, so it often causes gas and bloating. Avoid it if you have IBS.

Check with us first if you have: a past bowel blockage or a narrowing (stricture) in the esophagus or intestine; trouble swallowing; gastroparesis; a Crohn's or colitis flare; or a fluid limit for heart or kidney disease. If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often when you start psyllium.

Stop and call us if you have: severe belly pain or swelling, vomiting, chest pain or choking after a dose, rectal bleeding, or no bowel movement for 3 days with bloating.

Having a colonoscopy? Stop fiber supplements and high-fiber foods as your prep instructions say, usually 3 days before. Restart afterward.