

## Why Fiber is Important?

### A diet rich in high fiber foods can:

- Reduce the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes
- Lower the risk of several forms of cancer
- Improve cholesterol and blood pressure
- Help regulate your digestion and also help you feel fuller, so you may eat less

### What exactly is fiber?

Fiber is the part of plant foods that our bodies can't absorb or digest. Fiber is also known as roughage or bulk. There are two kinds of dietary fiber. It is important to eat plenty of both:

- **Insoluble fiber** comes from fruits, grains, and vegetables. It adds bulk and acts like a brush to clean out the colon. As it passes through the digestive tract, insoluble fiber remains mostly intact. This helps keep your bowel movements regular.
- **Soluble fiber** comes from fruit, some vegetables, oats, beans, peas, lentils, and barley, and helps control blood sugar and reduces cholesterol.

### What is a whole grain?

A **whole grain** has all three of its original parts: the bran (fiber-rich outer layer), the germ (inner layer), and the endosperm (middle layer). Whole grains are rich in nutrients, including fiber. See "*Fiber List*" for examples of recommended whole grains. A **refined grain** has been milled, so only the middle layer is left. Milling removes much of the vitamins, iron, protein, and fiber. "White" and "wheat" flours are enriched, which is a process where some of the nutrients are added back but not the fiber. White rice is also a refined grain.

### How much fiber do I need?

The American Heart Association recommends 25 – 38 grams of fiber a day. The average American eats only 15 grams of fiber a day. To add more fiber to your diet:

- Eat at least 5 servings of fruits/vegetables daily. Skins and peels contain a lot of fiber.
- Try more recipes with beans, peas, lentils, quinoa, bulgur, or brown rice.
- Eat oatmeal, bran, or another whole grain cereal for breakfast.
- Choose whole grains listed on the "Fiber List" handout.
- Make at least half of your grain serving's whole grains.
- Add fiber to your diet slowly. If you add it too fast, you may feel bloated or have gas.
- Unless your doctor has told you not to, drink 6 – 8 cups of water a day.
- Buy unprocessed foods when you can. Food processing often removes fiber.