

A monthly wellness newsletter from Better You

Fiber: The unsung hero of heart health

When you think of heart health, fiber may not be the first thing that comes to mind. But did you know this often-overlooked nutrient plays a big role in keeping the heart strong and healthy? Fiber is in plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. It works behind the scenes to support the heart in many helpful ways.



Fiber and cholesterol

One of fiber's most important jobs is to support healthy cholesterol levels. Soluble fiber, found in foods like oatmeal, apples, and beans, acts like a sponge in the digestive system. It sops up extra cholesterol and helps remove it from the body. This lowers our LDL "bad" cholesterol. When we have too much LDL cholesterol in our system, it can build up in blood vessels and cause blockages.

Blood sugar control

Fiber helps keep your blood sugar levels stable. Because fiber isn't digestible, it slows digestion and helps sugar enter the bloodstream more gradually. This is especially helpful for people at risk for diabetes, a condition that can damage blood

vessels and increase your risk for heart disease. Stable blood sugar levels mean less stress on the heart over time.

High fiber, low pressure

Diets high in fiber have been linked to lower blood pressure, which helps protect the heart and arteries. Many fiber-rich foods contain vitamins and minerals that help blood vessels relax and stay flexible. Healthy blood pressure reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Increase fiber, decrease inches

Fiber even helps with weight control, which is important for heart health. High-fiber foods help people feel satisfied and fuller longer without added calories, making it easier to avoid overeating. Maintaining

a healthy weight lowers the risk of heart problems and keeps your cardiovascular system working efficiently.

Healthy start to a healthy heart

Put simply, fiber is a powerful heart helper. Try gradually adding more fiber to your diet. Start your day with some steel-cut oats with raspberries and chia seeds, cook a meatless meal with beans, have fruit for dessert with the skin on, and eat vegetables with your meals to keep your heart healthy.

Learn more about heart health by clicking on the title to register for our [Blood Pressure Control](#) webinar series starting February 5th, or [DASH to Better Health](#) on February 10th.

Resources: [NIH.gov](https://www.nih.gov); [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org)

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Sleep well: Easy tips for insomnia

Do you struggle to fall asleep, stay asleep, or feel rested in the morning? You're not alone. Insomnia can make your day tough, leaving you tired, grumpy, and struggling to focus. If it continues, it can affect your health, mood, and daily tasks. Stress and worry can keep your brain active, even when your body is tired. But there are simple ways to calm your mind when it's time to sleep.

Try these practical tips to sleep better tonight:

- **Stick to a schedule:** Go to bed and wake up at the same times every day, including weekends. This helps your body's "sleep clock" get into a routine.
- **Wind down before bed:** Do relaxing things like reading, stretching, or slow breathing for 30-60 minutes before bed. Avoid screens, which can keep your brain awake.
- **Make your bedroom a sleep haven:** Keep it cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable. A good mattress and pillow can make a big difference.
- **Watch what you eat and drink:** Avoid caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime. They can disrupt your sleep.
- **Stay active, but not before bed:** Regular exercise during the day can help you sleep. However, avoid intense



workouts before bed and opt for gentle stretching or relaxation instead.

If you try these tips for a few weeks and still struggle to sleep, consider talking to a doctor or sleep specialist. They can provide extra support to help you overcome insomnia. By making small changes to your sleep habits, bedtime routine, and sleep space, you could sleep better, feel more refreshed, and enjoy brighter days ahead.

Resource: [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

Really Green Smoothie (Serves 1)

Ingredients:

- 1 large ripe banana
- 1 cup packed baby kale or coarsely chopped mature kale
- 1 cup unsweetened vanilla almond milk
- ¼ ripe avocado
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1 cup ice cubes

Directions:

Combine 1 banana, 1 cup kale, 1 cup almond milk, ¼ avocado, 1 tablespoon chia seeds and 2 teaspoons honey in a blender. Blend on high until creamy and smooth. Add 1 cup ice and blend until smooth.



Recipe courtesy of [Eatingwell.com](https://www.eatingwell.com); for nutritional information click [here](#).

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