

SHOPPING FOR MORE FIBER

■ By Laura Morris

Does an apple a day really keep the doctor away? Well, a couple of apples a day might do the trick. One apple contains approximately 5 grams of fiber, and according to the results of a recent study headed by Dr. Mark Pereira at the University of Minnesota, every 10 grams of fiber consumed per day decreases the risk of heart disease by 14 percent.

Essentially, dietary fiber includes lignin, pectin, cellulose, and hemicelluloses found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes. It assists the dietary tract in moving foodstuffs and can alleviate constipation in addition to other health benefits.

The problem is that Americans have been going against the grain and not eating enough fiber. The American Dietetic Association announced that the average American only consumes 12 to 14 grams of fiber when the recommended daily amount is 25 to 30 grams. This generates concern for fiber intake, especially when the country is already facing serious problems with obesity and heart disease.

MORE FIBER AWARENESS

Fortunately, many consumers today have not only become carb-conscious, but also fiber-conscious. Michelle Barry, vice president of Qualitative Research at The Hartman Group Inc., says, "With the low-carb craze, we've seen a heightened interest in fiber." According to a 2003 Hartman Group survey, approximately 60 percent of Americans said fiber at least sometimes affects their purchasing decisions.

In addition, more companies are making fiber claims. Another recent study by Productscan Online found that around 2.5 percent of new food and beverage products in North America have made fiber-rich claims in the last four years. That percentage moved up to 4.2 percent in 2004.

"Through our research, it became evident that fiber is a re-emerging trend across a variety of food categories. Everything from breads to breakfast cereals to even pasta," says Suzanna

Eygabroat, Director of Information Services at Productscan Online.

"Some of this has been in conjunction with the low-carb trend," she adds. Eygabroat explains that part of what various manufacturers do to make products low-carb is replace traditional grains with soy and texturizing additives, removing much of the grain and fiber content. "So, by adding fiber ingredients or enhancing the new products with fiber, companies are recognizing that shift and trying to meet consumers' dietary needs."

CUSTOMER EDUCATION

Natural health store retailers can help customers meet their fiber needs through education and a host of new products.

Mary Choate, registered dietitian and Food and Nutrition Educator at the Co-Op Food Stores in Hanover and Lebanon, N.H., offers literature that explains which foods have good sources of fiber, as well as how to get enough in your diet. There are also brochures on nuts and beans containing nutrition info and suggested recipes. The store also offers a pamphlet dedicated to whole grains, along with brand names of whole grains products. What's more, the information is made available throughout the store so customers can easily grab one while they're shopping.

"I think it's very helpful," Choate says. "They can find which products contain whole grains in the store, with that list in their hand." It also helps them make a faster and healthier choice, she adds. "I have the luxury of thinking about nutrition all day because that's what I do, but most people don't."

The co-op also teaches cooking classes where clients learn how to prepare various foods, including high-fiber items such as beans. "People get to taste some whole grain foods that they might not have been exposed to," she says, "And people love to sample."

At the Sunflower's Natural Food and Café in Danielson, Conn., they provide customer education another way. "I fax our daily specials, [which includes] a healthy fact of the day," says storeowner

Linda Wojcik. This healthy fact offers nutritional info on foods, such as the role of fiber in a diet. Wojcik adds, "We're teaching them every day something new [about] healthy living. That's [one] way we have personal contact with our customers."

When the store offers a new product, they also like to show customers what to do with it. For instance, when the store began carrying Organic 7 Grains and Seeds, they made a porridge out of it, then posted a sign with the recipe. Wojcik notes, "I'm not a big advocate of just selling [customers] something off the shelf. I want to teach them how to eat."

FIBER FOR BREAKFAST

One place where customers are looking for more fiber is in the breakfast aisle. Billy Griffin, president of New Moon Natural Foods in Lake Tahoe Calif., says, "I find ... when I get [customers] looking for fiber from food, it's frequently breakfast-oriented."

Steve Geest, head of purchasing at My Organic Market in Washington, D.C., has also found that people are looking for fiber in the cereal section. He says that many of the questions he gets concern which cereals have the highest fiber content.

Companies are also responding to consumer needs with high-fiber cereals. Kashi Company has just launched its new Heart to Heart Instant Oatmeal in September. It contains 5 grams of fiber per serving, and is offered in Golden Brown Maple, Apple Cinnamon, and Raison Spice. While people are looking for fiber in their diet, Jeff Johnson, the company's Director of Nutrition notes, "They're looking for ways to do it that are enjoyable."

Another company that recognizes this is Zoë Foods, which offer two high-fiber cereals that have 7 grams of fiber per serving — Cranberries Currants and Honey Almond.

"Cereal is an easy place to get fiber because it occurs naturally in whole grains," says company president Tori Stuart. When it comes to fiber, she says, "The primary drivers are the

flaxseed and the rolled oats. All of our products have about one tablespoon of flaxseed per serving." They have also redesigned the packaging to enhance its fiber content.

INTERESTING AND NEW FIBER PRODUCTS Baking Mixes

New baking mixes are also boasting fiber benefits. Foods and Culinary Technology Group has just launched its new high-fiber, low-carb baking mixes for cookies, brownies, and blueberry muffins, as well as an all-purpose baking mix for high-fiber and low-carb bread or pizza crust.

"All of our products are high fiber," says company president Jacqueline Danforth. For a 30-gram cookie, there's 5 grams of fiber, the 40-gram brownie offers 7 grams and there are a whopping 10 grams of fiber in two slices of their bread. Danforth says, "I see fiber as having [an increasingly] important role, as consumers recognize [its] benefits."

Snacks

Consumers can find snacks with good sources of fiber. This year, Nature's Path introduced the Authentic 1960's Organic Granola Bars. They include the HempPlus Granola Bar, Apricot and Nut Granola Bar, Cranberry and Soy Granola Bar, and the Pumpkin Flax Plus Granola Bar. They each have 3 grams of fiber per bar.

Eden Foods recently introduced a line of snacks that contain 3 to 5 grams of fiber per serving. This includes dry-roasted Tamari Almonds, Dried Mount Montmorency Tart Cherries, and Organic Spicy Pumpkin Seeds.

Pasta

Despite the low-carb sensation, pasta makers are seeing consumer interest in whole grain pastas. Eden Foods now carries 18 types of whole grain pasta. "In 2004, our whole grain Kamut and Spelt Pasta sales are up more than 30 percent. It's pretty phenomenal during the low carb frenzy," says Sue Becker, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for the company.

Distant relatives of wheat, both kamut and spelt are high in fiber. For instance, Eden's Organic Spelt Ribbon has 5 grams of fiber per serving. In addition, the com-

pany has introduced the Eden Organic Flax Rice Spiral, a pasta made with golden amber Durham wheat, flaxseed and organic brown rice that contains 4 grams of fiber.

In addition, Ronzini Foods offers the Ronzini Healthy Harvest, a whole wheat pasta that comes in a variety of shapes and boasts 6 grams of fiber.

With increased awareness and exciting, new products becoming available on the market today, your customers have more opportunities than ever when shopping for fiber. ■

Laura Morris is a Toronto-based freelance writer. She specializes in food, health, and lifestyle topics.

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