

To the Kids:

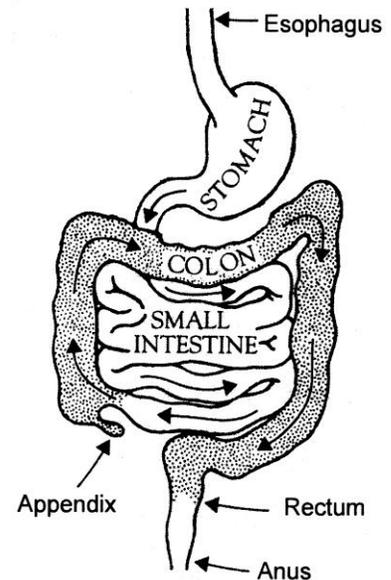
Get Fiber in Your Food to Keep Your Colon Healthy and Happy!

My colon?! Where is it?

It's the last big section of where your food goes after you eat. What you eat goes to your stomach, to your small intestine, to your colon (the shaded part in the drawing), and then it goes out as poop into the toilet.

Why should I care about my colon?

Most of what you eat is taken into your body when it goes through your small intestine. What's left over goes to your colon. It's very watery when it gets there. As it moves through your colon, water is pulled out into your body, so that by the time it leaves your colon, it's a pile of poop. Fiber in your food helps make your poop bigger and softer so you can poop easily.



What's "fiber in my food"?

Fiber is in the plants you eat, like carrots, bananas, and wheat used to make bread. Fiber doesn't leave your small intestine, so it's a leftover that goes to your colon. The fiber soaks up water, which makes your poop big and soft, and easier for the muscles in your colon to push it along. If you don't eat much fiber, your poop is smaller and harder and your colon muscles have a hard time pushing it along—and you have a harder time pooping. Your colon is not happy—and neither are you!

How much fiber should I eat?

The chart gives the grams of fiber recommended per day. Add up the grams of fiber in what you eat. After a while, you can pretty much tell if you're getting enough fiber by just looking at what you eat.

Read food labels. *Dietary Fiber 5g* means that there are 5 grams of fiber in a serving of that food. If you eat at places like McDonald's, go to their websites to get the grams of fiber in their food because restaurants can change their recipes and the sizes of their food.

For foods that don't have labels, look up the grams of fiber online or in a book. For example, the *Are You Eating Right* book* says that a medium-size apple has 4 grams of fiber. You learn that apples have more fiber than apple juice, that oatmeal has more fiber than most of your favorite breakfast cereals, and that brown rice has

Children	per day
1-3 years	19 grams
4-8 years	25 grams
Males	
9-13 years	31 grams
14-50 years	38 grams
50+ years	30 grams
Females	
9-18 years	26 grams
19-50 years	25 grams
50+ years	21 grams
Pregnant	28 grams
Breastfeeding	29 grams

more fiber than white rice. Foods from animals (meat, fish, milk, eggs) have zero fiber, but have other important things like protein and calcium.

Eat many kinds of food, mostly food you already know is good for you, and a much smaller amount of food you already know is not so good for you—like candy and soda. This will make your colon—and you—healthier and happier!

Judi Morrill, Ph.D., San Jose State University
Dept. of Nutrition, Food Science, and Packaging

To the Parents: The impetus for this article was seeing my grandkids and their friends eating a very low fiber diet and having problems with constipation. I can't force them to eat more fruits, veggies, and whole grains, so my hope is that if they understand a bit about fiber and the colon, they'll take charge of eating better.

Food labels and restaurant websites are the best places to find the grams of fiber in their standardized food products. For unlabeled food like apples and lettuce, it's harder to estimate the amount of fiber, mostly because of variation in size and amount. The difference in fiber between a green Granny Smith apple and a Red Delicious apple is minor compared to the difference between a small and a medium apple of the same variety.

Practically speaking, we just need a general idea of the amount of fiber in the food we eat. Being more conscious of fiber nudges us toward eating more of the veggies, fruits, and whole grains that most of us don't eat enough of. Kids look at what you eat and buy. When they're young, you have a lot of control. What you feed them can influence their diet and health for years to come.

It dilutes the message to tell kids that fiber affects many other things besides their poop, e.g., there are trillions of bacteria in our colon, and fiber affects the kinds of bacteria that live there and affect our health. There are many kinds of fiber, so it's best to get it from a variety of food.

Frozen veggies and fruit are usually a bargain, keep well in your freezer, and can be more nutritious than fresh produce because they are typically flash-frozen soon after harvest when they are most nutrient-packed. As for organic produce or not, I venture to say that any health advantage of organic is over-blown. Convincing consumers that they should "only buy organic" has certainly changed the marketplace. Organic produce typically costs more, so consumers on a limited budget who "only buy organic" buy and eat less produce, which usually results in a poorer diet.

*Morrill, Stone, Murphy. *Are You Eating Right? Compare your diet to the official recommendations using the nutrient content of 5000+ foods.* ISBN 0-9657951-7-9 www.orangegrovepub.com

For additional info: www.nutrition.gov/life-stages/children/food-nutrition
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childnutrition.html

March 2016