

- Diabetes / Food—Fiber content

Does a diet high in fibre help manage blood sugar levels

The Hindu (Delhi) · 10 Nov 2023 · II · Zubeda Hamid

Reduce sugar is the catch phrase heard frequently to manage diabetes, so much so that as the festive season approaches, sweet shops are bringing out lowsugar delicacies. 'Natural', 'no sugar' and 'diabetic friendly' options abound a testament to the staggering numbers India is dealing with.



What happens though, when you add a significant quantity of fibre to your diet when you have diabetes? A survey attempted to find the answer.

'STAR' (Survey for Management of Diabetes with Fibre-rich Nutrition Drink), a pan-India survey, was conducted amongst 3,042 people with Type 2 diabetes, the results were published in the Indian Journal of Clinical Practice carbohydrate remains the same. What is concerning, is that a lot of the carbohydrates are from ultraprocessed food."

What constitutes fibre?

Healthy diets are unaffordable for a large number of people who rely on cheaper, carb-heavy foods, thereby contributing to the diabetes burden

According to an article on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, fibre is soluble and insoluble. Both have health benefits.

Soluble fibre dissolves in water and slows down digestion. It helps control blood sugar and cholesterol. It is found in fruits like apples, bananas and guavas, and in oats, peas, carrots, black beans, kidney beans and figs.

The other kind, insoluble fibre, does not dissolve, and typically remains whole as it passes through your stomach. It supports insulin sensitivity and helps keep your bowels healthy. It is found in whole wheat flour, nuts, seeds, lentil and vegetables like cauliflower.

The cost factor

Fruits, vegetables and nuts are more expensive compared to carbohydrates, points out Nihal Thomas, senior professor, department of endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism, Christian Medical College, Vellore.

This, he said, makes healthy diets unaffordable for a large number of people in the country who rely on cheaper, carb-heavy foods, thereby contributing to the diabetes burden 10.13 crore people in our country of 14.0 crore could potentially be diabetic, as per latest estimates.

Prof Thomas called for policy changes to make healthier foods more affordable.

Incorporating in the diet

25 to 40 grams of fibre per day may sound daunting, especially when you realise that one medium apple, with its skin, has only about 3 to 4 grams of fibre.

The idea, says the CDC, is to spread your fibre intake among different foods throughout the day. This may perhaps mean incorporating oats and nuts into your breakfast, opting for whole grains, choosing nonstarchy vegetables and snacking on seeds. But it also cautions people to make this move slowly: too much fibre too soon, can lead to bloating and constipation.

And remember, drink lots of water!

(Zubeda.h@thehindu.co.in)

For feedback and suggestions

for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'