

# Meet our diet's superhero: fiber

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Are you deficient in protein? Most likely, the answer is no. Despite fear-stoking by food marketers and industry lobbyists, protein deficiency is rare to non-existent in our country. But there is one substance that you may want to take a closer look at: fiber. A stunning 97 percent of Americans are deficient in dietary fiber—and this has serious implications for our health.

In his new book, *Fiber Fueled*, Dr. Will Bulsiewicz explains how the traditional American diet, which relies on processed food, meat and dairy, is wreaking havoc on the vast community of microorganisms that inhabit our intestines—our “gut microbiota.” These microorganisms digest the food we eat and use it to either create health-promoting compounds (postbiotics) or, in the case of unhealthy food, to create inflammatory compounds that harm us. Every human carries 39 trillion microorganisms in their colon, and this microbiota, operating within our gastrointestinal (enteric) nervous system, is so important it has come to be called our “second brain.”

Dr. Bulsiewicz explains in this ground-breaking book that when we eat unhealthy foods, we incur dysbiosis—an imbalance

within the gut. Beneficial microbes die and inflammatory microbes grow, releasing bacterial endotoxins that spill into the bloodstream and cause inflammation and a host of diseases.

“Bacterial endotoxemia has been linked to a myriad of diseases including autoimmunity, obesity, coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer’s, alcoholic hepatitis, non-alcoholic fatty liver, osteoarthritis... I could keep going,” he writes.

The modern food system in America is geared toward profit, not health. Many products are highly refined, with the fiber stripped away, so they are quickly absorbed in the small intestine rather than slowly digested. Many foods are also loaded with salt, chemical preservatives, additives and colorants. In fact, there are ten thousand additives in our foods that are listed by our government as “generally recognized as safe.” Shockingly, the small fraction that has been tested has been shown to damage our gut microbiota.

Despite all the medical breakthroughs and benefits that come with living in an “advanced” nation, the United States rates 43rd in life expectancy in the world. Americans are woefully deficient in fiber; we eat a mere 15 grams daily in comparison with the Hazda people of

Africa, who eat 100+ grams per day.

Dr. Bulsiewicz writes that fiber comes only from plants; it is actually plants’ cellular structure. Soluble fiber, along with resistant starch (found in foods like oats, rice, potatoes and legumes) acts as a “prebiotic.” It is broken down by our gut bacteria and produces short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). SCFAs heal our colons by suppressing the growth of inflammatory bacteria and feeding the growth of healthy microbes. SCFAs do some pretty heavy lifting when it comes to our health. They regulate our immune system and inflammatory response; people with inflammatory diseases such as Crohn’s and rheumatoid arthritis respond positively when they switch to a plant-based diet. SCFAs put the brakes on unchecked cell multiplication and growth, inhibiting cancer development. A 2019 *Lancet* study showed that fiber from whole foods was shown to protect against colorectal, breast, and esophageal cancer. SCFAs help our bodies in many other ways, such as reducing the incidence of heart disease, stroke, obesity and cognitive dysfunction. Fiber and SCFAs are truly the rock stars of human health!

This information is potentially life-changing; I know it was for me. I was raised on the typical American diet—heavy on



meat and dairy, along with processed foods such as white bread and other refined starches. As I got older I gravitated to “healthier” foods such as whole grains, but basically my diet didn’t change much. At around age 48 I started experiencing severe inflammation in my joints and I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. My pain was so extreme and unrelenting I began going to doctors, seeking any remedy to ease the suffering. After a few years of this, a good friend read T. Colin Campbell’s “The China Study” and changed her diet to plant-based. After many discussions with her, I changed my diet too—and the results were astounding. Within five days of eliminating meat, dairy and processed foods and eating only plant-based foods, my arthritis disappeared completely. At age 59, I am still completely pain free.

Bottom line? We all need more fiber in our

diets. And it’s not just the amount of fiber that is important, Dr. Bulsiewicz says. We also need to include a diversity of plants in our diet. He cites Dr. Rob Knight, creator of the American Gut Project, the largest and most diverse study of microbes and microbiomes in the industrialized world. Dr. Knight’s finding: “The single greatest predictor of a healthy gut microbiome is the diversity of plants in one’s diet.” He found that consuming at least 30 different plants in a given week was the best predictor of gut microbial diversity.

*Are you interested in learning more about how a plant-based diet can improve your health? Ask questions and join the conversation on Facebook at Plant-Based Advocates – Los Gatos and Plant-based Friends! You can also jump on our contact list for news and local events by emailing me at karenr@phc.net.*

## Autumn Butternut Squash Soup

From [forksoverknives.com](http://forksoverknives.com)

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups small cauliflower florets (½-inch florets)
- 1 medium yellow onion, cut into ¼-inch dice
- 1 medium yellow or orange bell pepper, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh garlic
- 1 teaspoon caraway seeds
- 1 bay leaf
- 5 cups 1-inch butternut squash cubes (about 1½ pounds peeled or 2½ pounds unpeeled)
- 2 cups unsweetened almond milk
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley

### Instructions:

1. Steam the cauliflower in a steamer insert set over boiling water, covered, for 5 minutes, until tender when pierced with a fork. Remove from heat and transfer to a bowl to cool.
2. Heat a skillet on high, until a few drops of water sizzle when sprinkled into the pan. Add the onions, bell peppers, garlic, and caraway seeds; sauté on high, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes or until the onions turn translucent.
3. Add the bay leaf, butternut squash, and 2 cups of water. Cook on medium heat until the squash is tender, about 15 minutes.
4. Add the almond milk, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Remove the bay leaf and puree the soup with a hand blender.
5. Stir in the cauliflower. Garnish with parsley and serve hot.

