Dietary fiber is the non-digestible portion of plant foods. It is found in fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains. While fiber passes through the digestive tract fairly intact, this doesn’t mean it is inactive.

Recent research points to a trio of clues as how dietary fiber provides cancer protective benefits.

1 - CANCER-PROTECTIVE PHYTOCHEMICALS such as polyphenols – found in many plant foods – hitch a ride with dietary fiber as it travels through the gut, protecting our digestive system along the way.

2 – BACTERIA in the large intestine work on dietary fiber and one of the by-products is a fatty acid called butyrate. Butyrate offers the double whammy of inhibiting cancer cell growth and supplying normal cells with needed energy.

3 – A SATISFIED APPETITE results from the dietary fiber found in whole grains. They can ward off overeating and obesity, which is indirectly linked to a higher cancer risk.

Women should aim for at least 21-25 grams and men 30-38 grams of fiber daily. Read the nutrition labels on packaged foods for fiber content per serving.

Examples of whole grains that have high fiber per 1 cup serving include bran flakes, whole-wheat spaghetti, cooked barley, oatmeal and brown rice. One slice of whole or multi-grain bread had 1.9 grams of fiber.

Fruits with an average of 2-3 grams of fiber per serving (1/2) cup include raspberries, dried figs, mangoes, oranges, pears and apples.

Vegetables with 2.5 – 5 grams per serving (1/2 cup) include green peas, sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts.

Dried beans with 6-8 grams per serving (1/2 cup) include most beans (kidney, black, navy, white, pinto, chickpeas, etc.) Dried beans are an exceptionally good source of fiber.

It is not that difficult to consume a high fiber diet. For example, eat a half-cup of cooked oatmeal sprinkled with chopped apple and nuts for breakfast, lentil soup for lunch, unbuttered popcorn for a snack, whole-grain pasta with dinner and a pear for an evening snack. This adds up to almost 32 grams of dietary fiber and doesn’t include any fortified foods for fiber supplements.

Last May, the World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research Continuous Update Project reported that fiber plays a convincing role in cancer prevention.

Eat well and stay well.

Nancy Behrendt, Congregational Health Ministry


"...I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” 3 John 1:2