

# Psyllium is Not Such A Silly Choice

By Rebecca Morley, MA

We plan to eat our daily recommended 8-9 servings of fruit and vegetables, but sometimes our schedules make this difficult. So what's a body to do? Adding a psyllium supplement might be a smart choice.

Psyllium, a plant native to Iran and India contains tiny husk covered seeds. This husk contains glycosides and mucilage used in the food industry to form gels that thicken and add texture to foods. The husk, is a source of water soluble fiber, similar to fiber found in grains such as oats and barley. But just compare the amount of soluble fiber in psyllium and oat bran!

- 100 grams psyllium = 71 grams soluble fiber
- 100 grams oat bran = 5 grams soluble fiber

Psyllium fiber contributes zero calories as it passes down the gastrointestinal tract. It's only nutritional value is fiber. Adding water to dry psyllium causes it to swell up to ten times its original volume. Psyllium products have been used to increase fecal bulk and loosen stools, as ways of treating constipation.



There are many brands and flavors.



Scientists have learned how soluble fiber affects metabolism. This affirms psyllium's role in lowering blood cholesterol levels. And health claims are allowed for psyllium containing products. Adding psyllium to diets, low in overall fats, saturated and trans-fats can reduce total cholesterol levels by 4% and low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol by 7%. Since psyllium's soluble fiber inhibits fat and cholesterol absorption, blood lipids are lowered.

Whenever possible, include multiple sources of fiber in your diet. Most fruits and veggies contain both fiber as well as vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Remember, you can't really replace them with psyllium alone. About 30 grams of fiber each /day is recommended. It appears that there are advantages to increasing the amount of soluble dietary fiber like the kind found in Psyllium.

Powdered psyllium is "easy to swallow" and when mixed with a tall glass of water, helps increase fluid intake too. It's recommended to start with a small amount, say 1/2 teaspoon per day, gradually working up to up to 3 tablespoons daily. And an ideal to take psyllium is at bedtime, so it works its magic while you sleep.

References: [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 2000;71-2, 472-479](#) & [USFDA Talk Paper:](#)