Sources of pectin (soluble fiber)?

Alice,

I was told to eat foods with pectin. All I know is that apples have pectin. Do any other foods contain pectin?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It sounds like pectin's piqued your interest! This water-soluble dietary fiber slows the passage of food through the intestine and helps lower blood cholesterol levels by reducing the absorption of cholesterol from food in the intestinal tract. Found in most plants, pectin is often used as a thickening agent and stabilizer in food as its jelly-like consistency helps formulate and thicken jams or marmalades, which would otherwise be sweet juices. Where can you find it? Look no further than common fruits, vegetables, and other foods such as legumes and dairy products. Keep reading to learn more about foods that contain pectin and the effects of consuming it.

Although pectin can be found in most plants and is naturally part of the human diet, it isn’t a major contributor to the composition of any one food item. Additionally, despite being in most plants, it only makes up a small part of these foods. Apples and citrus fruits — such as peaches, oranges, grapefruits, apricots, and lemons — contain the highest amount of pectin among fruits. And among vegetables, carrots, tomatoes, and potatoes are those with the most pectin. Peas have the highest pectin concentration among legumes. This particular food component is also often added to other foods and drinks, including soft drinks, desserts, and dairy products (such as yogurt).

What’s the effect of consuming pectin? For one, it’s been shown to decrease blood cholesterol levels by three to seven percent. Studies also show that pectin can help alleviate constipation, improve digestive functioning, and treat diarrhea due to the pectin fibers binding to bile (a fluid produced by the liver from cholesterol that aids in digestion) in the intestine, which is then excreted from the body. Studies are even being conducted to determine pectin’s potential benefits for preventing and treating certain types of cancer.

It’s worth noting again that pectin doesn’t make up the most of any given food's composition. If
you’re looking for foods with the highest concentration of pectin, apples and citrus fruits are your best bet. If you’re looking for other ways to increase fiber intake or maintain a balanced diet, you may consider consulting with a medical provider or dietitian for more suggestions.

Peace and pectin,

Alice!

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