



Resistant Starch: Third Kind of Natural Fiber Promises Better Health

December 2007

Q. I've heard something recently about the benefits of "resistant starch." What is it resistant to? Where do I find it?

A. It's resistant to digestion. Despite its unappealing name, resistant starch is—as Martha Stewart is fond of saying—a good thing.

What It Is. So-called starchy foods have long suffered a bad reputation. But starches are simply long chains of sugar molecules linked together. Certain kinds of starch contain links that resist digestion and therefore can't be absorbed in the small intestine. This "resistant starch" passes through to the large intestine.

There, resistant starch acts as a prebiotic, encouraging the growth of health-promoting bacteria and reducing harmful bacteria. The fermentation that occurs from the bacteria it promotes increases levels of butyrate, a fatty acid believed to have anticancer and anti-inflammatory properties.

Where to Find It. Resistant starch is found naturally in unripe bananas, lentils, beans, whole grains like oats, rye, wheat, barley, corn and whole-grain breads and cereals. It also forms in potatoes, rice and pasta that are cooked then cooled, which actually restructures the starch's links.

Resistant starch is also added to some processed foods, like gluten-free pretzels, and it is available as a baking ingredient to be used as a partial substitute (10% to 25%) for flour in recipes. Called *Hi-maize*, because it's derived from corn, it can be ordered from King Arthur flour, www.kingarthurfour.com (search for *Hi-maize*) or 800-827-6836.

A Third Fiber? While nutritionists typically classify fiber as soluble or insoluble, some experts consider resistant starch a third type with unique health benefits.

There have been more than 150 studies suggesting many benefits from eating resistant starch: it provides only two to three calories per gram instead of four like other carbohydrates, it lowers glycemic and insulin responses, it promotes digestive health and it may encourage fat burning. And animal studies suggest it may be especially helpful in preventing weight regain after an initial weight loss.

How Much Is Healthy? Some experts believe we should double our current intake of resistant starch, though there's no specific recommendation. But you can make some easy changes, such as making all your sandwiches on whole-grain bread and eating lentil soup instead of chicken noodle, muesli instead of puffed rice, and cold pasta salad instead of hot pasta.

EN's Bottom Line. Resistant starch is no miracle food component, but it is part of a healthful diet that includes beans, lentils and whole grains. For more of a boost, try substituting *Hi-maize* for part of the flour in recipes and opt for food products with resistant starch as an ingredient. You may see more of them in the coming year.

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