Whole Grains and Fiber
The term fiber refers to carbohydrates, specifically plant products, that are not digestible by the human body. Fibers can be classified as soluble or insoluble. Soluble fiber partially dissolves in water, while insoluble fiber does not. Sources of soluble fiber include oatmeal, oat bran, nuts and seeds, peas, beans, and fruits such as apples, pears, strawberries, and blueberries. Soluble fiber has been shown to help lower blood cholesterol, which can decrease one’s risk for heart disease. Insoluble fiber from whole grains, wheat bran, carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, and celery aids the body in moving foods through the digestive system and in having normal bowel function.

In addition to lowering the risk of heart disease, diets high in fiber have also been shown to protect against type 2 diabetes. A study done by Harvard School of Public Health showed that diets high in refined foods such as white bread, white rice, refined cereals, and white pasta were twice as likely to lead to diabetes than diets containing high fiber foods.

In order to determine how many grams of fiber a child should have each day, you should add five to the child’s age in years. For example, a ten-year-old should get about 15 grams of fiber each day. Information about the fiber content of foods is found on their nutrition labels.

(Sources: USDA, Harvard School of Public Health, American Heart Association)

Making Fiber Part of Your Family's Diet
Although many kids often cringe at the mere mention of fiber, they're probably eating fiber every day without even realizing that it's so good for them. And there are plenty of creative, fun, and even tasty ways to incorporate these fiber-rich foods into your child's diet.

Breakfast
• Make oatmeal (a whole grain) part of your kids' morning meals.
• Opt for whole-wheat or other whole-grain cereals that list ingredients such as whole wheat or oats as one of the first few items on the ingredient list.
• Make pancakes with whole-grain (or buckwheat) pancake mix and top with apples, berries, or raisins.
• Serve bran or whole grain waffles topped with fruit.
• Offer whole-wheat bagels or English muffins, instead of white toast.
• Top fiber-rich cereal with apples, oranges, berries, or bananas. Add almonds to pack even more fiber punch.
• Mix your child's favorite cereal with a fiber-rich one or top it with a tablespoon of bran.

Lunch and Dinner
• Make sandwiches with whole-grain breads (rye, oat, or wheat), instead of white.
• Serve whole-grain rolls with dinner, instead of white rolls.
• Use whole-grain spaghetti and other pastas, instead of white.
• Serve wild or brown rice with meals, instead of white rice. Add beans (kidney, black, navy, and pinto) to rice dishes for even more fiber.
• Spice up salads with berries and almonds, chickpeas, cooked artichokes, and beans (kidney, black, navy, or pinto).
• Use whole-grain (corn or whole wheat) soft-taco shells or tortillas to make burritos or wraps. Fill them with eggs and cheese for breakfast; turkey, cheese, lettuce, tomato, and light dressing for lunch; and beans, salsa, taco sauce, and cheese for dinner.
• Add lentils or whole-grain barley to your child's favorite soups.
• Include fresh fruit as part of your child's packed school lunch.

Snacks and Treats
• Bake cookies or muffins using whole-wheat flour, instead of regular. Or use some whole-wheat and some regular flour, so that the texture of your baked treats won't be drastically different from what your child is used to. Add raisins, berries, bananas, or chopped or pureed apples to the mix for even more fiber.
• Add bran to baking items such as cookies and muffins.
• Top whole-wheat crackers with peanut butter or low-fat cheese.
• Offer popcorn - a whole-grain food - as a mid-day treat or while your child watches TV or movies. Aim for popcorn without lots of added fat or sugar. (However, only give popcorn to kids over 4 years old because the popular snack can be a choking hazard.)
• Top ice cream, frozen yogurt, or regular yogurt with whole-grain cereal, berries, or almonds for some added nutrition and crunch.
• Serve apples topped with peanut butter.
• Make fruit salad with pears, apples, bananas, oranges, and berries. Top with almonds for added crunch. Serve as a side dish with meals or alone as a snack.
• Make low-fat breads, muffins, or cookies with canned pumpkin.
• Leave the skins on when giving your child fruits and veggies as snacks or as part of a meal.

(Sources: USDA, Harvard School of Public Health, American Heart Association, www.kidshealth.org)