SYMPOSIUM ON DIETARY FIBER: CHEMISTRY AND PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Introduction

There is today considerable interest in dietary (or food) fiber, even though no universally accepted definition of "fiber" is available. Primary interest has focused on the reported beneficial effects of fiber in the prevention of certain gastrointestinal and vascular diseases. However, because of the many different types of food fiber (hemicelluloses, cellulose, lignin, pectins, gums, and mucilages), research on the different kinds of fiber and their interactions with other metabolites is expanding.

At the 176th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society in Miami Beach, FL, Sept 1978, the Division of Carbohydrate Chemistry sponsored a symposium on dietary fiber, emphasizing the carbohydrate nature of these materials. In Jan 1980, the National Large Bowel Cancer Project sponsored a 2-day conference in Houston on the effects of fiber on diseases of the colon, accenting the beneficial effects of fiber in the prevention of various colon diseases.

This symposium, sponsored by the Division of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, was presented at the 179th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society, Houston, TX, March 1980. Speakers were invited to present their research on the chemistry (composition and reactions with other materials) of different sources of dietary fiber, methods for analysis of fiber and fiber reactions, effects of various kinds of fiber on some physiological processes, and the catabolism of some kinds of "nutritive" fiber by intestinal microflora. We have learned and are learning much about food fiber, but we still do not have all the answers. These papers (some of the 10 papers presented in 2 sessions) will, we hope, answer some of the questions about what fiber is and what it does.

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