What is the most important element in a good diabetic diet? A good case could be made for fiber. While fiber is important for anyone, it is especially important for a diabetic.

There is no substitute for a balanced diet with a predominance of starchy carbohydrates and low amounts of fats and simple sugars. But a diet high in fiber brings many additional benefits in diabetes.

One of the most useful effects of fiber in the diet is that it causes a slower and steadier absorption of the nutrients from the gut. This prevents the blood sugar from shooting too high and then dropping just as quickly. It gives a diabetic better control of the blood sugar, which is the primary goal in diabetes. A high blood sugar and elevated insulin levels are believed to be the cause of many of the vascular complications of diabetes.

Another useful action of fiber is that it decreases the cholesterol level. This is important for everyone, but for diabetics it is particularly important since they already suffer greater damage to the blood vessels of the heart, kidneys, and other organs.

Another good effect of increased fiber is that it keeps the gut healthy. A person will have less trouble with constipation and less chance of developing colon cancer. Also, a diet high in fiber will help prevent diverticula which are troublesome outpouchings of the colon wall that may become infected and even require surgery.

The best foods for diabetes are ones high in fiber and starches and low in fats and sugars. So fruits, vegetables and grains are excellent foods for anyone with diabetes and should make up a large portion of the diet.