



Whole Grains – What are they, and why eat more of them?

Whole grains often get a bad rap.... Most people associate them with less taste or more of a hassle to cook with. But actually, this is not really the case, and there are simple ways to incorporate them into your diet and lifestyle. A regular intake of whole grains can have a significant impact on your overall health and wellness. Here's some information to consider.

Why bother eating whole grains?

Clinical trials evaluating the benefits of two and a half or more servings of whole grains per day have shown reduced risk of developing heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and weight gain.

Helping to prevent heart disease:

As reported in the Whole Grains Council website, after following 21,376 male physicians for almost 20 years, Luc Djoussé and J. Michael Gaziano at Harvard found that those eating two to six servings of whole grain cereal a week reduced their risk of heart failure 22%, while those eating whole grains daily reduced risk by 28%. For this study, cereals with at least 25% whole grain or bran by weight were classified as whole grain. *Archives of Internal Medicine, October 2007; 167: 2080-2085* And, in a relatively new study, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in June, '07, researchers reported further evidence in the benefits associated with whole-grain foods, now seeing a positive correlation of a reduced risk of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and whole grain foods.

Helping to prevent Type 2 Diabetes:

According to the Harvard School of Public health, two dietary changes can have a significant impact in reducing the risk of diabetes, one of which is increasing the intake of whole-grain foods (the other is choosing good fats instead of the bad ones). White bread, white rice, mashed potatoes, donuts, bagels, and many breakfast cereals have what's called a high glycemic index. That means they cause sustained spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels. Carbohydrates that aren't as easily digested cause lower, slower increases in blood sugar and insulin. As a result, they stress the body's insulin-making machinery less, and so help prevent type 2 diabetes. Such foods have a low glycemic index. Examples include whole wheat, brown rice, other whole grains, most beans and nuts, and whole grain breakfast cereals.

Helping to prevent weight gain:

Whole grains can also help maintain a healthy weight by delaying hunger. Meals high in whole grains often lead to consuming less per meal and during the course of a day. Because fiber is indigestible, it adds bulk to foods, which in turn slows down digestion. The result is that you'll feel fuller longer.

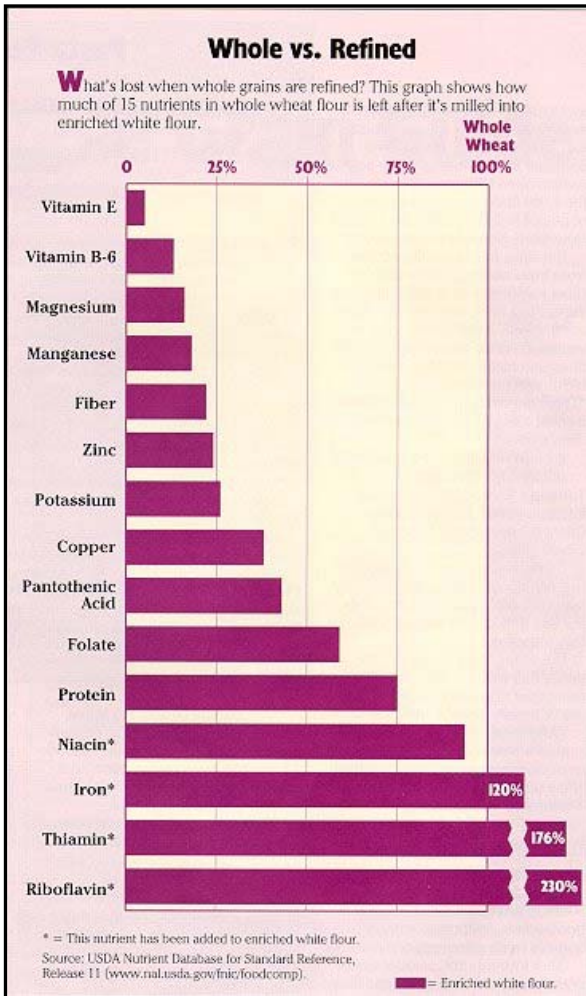
In addition, whole grains have other beneficial qualities:

- Whole grains are nutrient dense foods, meaning they have lots of great nutrients packed into a small amount of food that's low in calories, a rich source of carbohydrates, and even contains small amounts of protein & fat. Vitamin E is also found in whole grains, as much as you'll find in fruits and veggies.
- They help protect against damage caused by free radicals, which can lead to cancer. They also include magnesium, potassium, and folate.
- They can help lower cholesterol because they include an antioxidant called phytosterols.
- They are sources of fiber:
 - Helps block the absorption of cholesterol
 - Promote healthy digestion

What is a whole-grain?

Whole grains are made from the whole kernels of grain, that is both the inside part of the grain and the outer covering – (the bran, the germ, and the endosperm).

Processed flours remove the outer covering which gives a lighter texture and taste to baked goods but removes a lot of the nutrition and fiber. In this chart from the USDA nutrition database, you can see how much is removed when grains are refined. The pink bars represent the amount of vitamins and minerals that remain, (compared to 100% of each, with whole wheat flour)



Enriched breads have some nutrients returned to the bread (Iron, Thiamin, and Riboflavin), so be sure to read the labels when you are shopping. Often times, foods are sold under the umbrella of whole grains, when in reality, they are largely enriched flour-based products.

Here are a few things to keep an eye out for, when shopping for whole grain products:

- Look for the word “whole” in the ingredients list. If the first ingredient is enriched flour, then it is not a whole grain product.
- The closer a whole grain ingredient is to the top of the list of ingredients, the more of it the food contains.
- Black and yellow food industry stamp ensuring that the product contains at least half a serving or more of whole grain.
- Be careful of the terms stone ground and multi-grain. They sound good, but usually the grain is not left intact, and you’re likely not reaping the benefits of whole grain.
- There are other sources for whole grains besides breads and pastas. Whole grain foods and flours include 100 percent whole wheat, brown rice, bulgur, corn, buckwheat, oatmeal, spelt, and wild rice. The USDA suggests that each of us get at least three servings of whole grains every day.

Make Easy Substitutions to increase your intake of Whole Grains:

- Substitute half the white flour with whole wheat flour in your regular recipes for cookies, muffins, quick breads and pancakes. Or be bold and add up to 20% of another whole grain flour such as sorghum.
- Replace one third of the flour in a recipe with quick oats or old-fashioned oats.
- Add half a cup of cooked bulgur, wild rice, or barley to bread stuffing.
- Add half a cup of cooked wheat or rye berries, wild rice, brown rice, sorghum or barley to your favorite canned or home-made soup.
- Use whole corn meal for corn cakes, corn breads and corn muffins.
- Add three-quarters of a cup of uncooked oats for each pound of oatmeal when you make burgers or meatloaf.
- Stir a handful of oats in your yogurt, for quick crunch with no cooking necessary.

A great idea for your Thanksgiving festivities:

Nutty wild rice with sweet cranberries, apples and heart-healthy walnuts.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup wholegrain rice, uncooked
- 1 cup wild rice, uncooked
- 4 cups fat free, low sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup apple, diced
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts

PREPARATION:

Rinse and drain wild rice with cold water. Place wholegrain and wild rice in a large saucepan with the broth, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until rice is tender and broth is absorbed, about 45 minutes. Transfer rice to a large bowl and fold in cranberries, diced apple and walnuts. Serves 6-8.

An alternative to your Cookie recipes to consider:

Follow the standard recipe, except replace half of the flour with whole wheat flour. Go one step further and remove 1/3rd of the butter, as most recipes do not require the amounts listed. (I use the Nestle Toll House recipe, with half whole wheat flour and about 1/2 of the butter required).