

Habits for a Healthy Life



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Healthy Habit #8

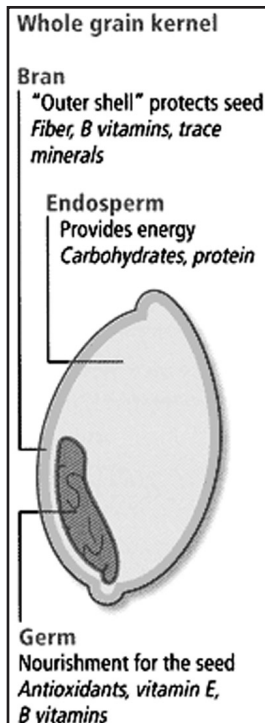
By Elizabeth George MD

Choose Whole Grains

What's so important about whole grains?

Once you understand what "whole grain" means, it will be easy for you to see why it's so important to get whole grains back into the American diet. Grains include wheat, oats, corn, brown rice, rye, barley, buckwheat, and many others.

Whole grains include all three parts of a grain's seed or kernel in the same proportions as they occur naturally growing in a field. The seed's three parts are the bran, germ and endosperm. **Bran**, the outer layer, contains antioxidants, B vitamins and fiber; it protects the other parts of the seed from sunlight, pests and other damage. The **germ** is the part that would eventually sprout into a new plant; it contains lignans, protein, iron, magnesium, zinc, calcium, healthy fats, vitamin E, and B vitamins (which include folate, niacin, thiamine, B12). The **endosperm** provides the germ with food as starchy carbohydrates and proteins.



Before the Industrial Revolution, all grains were "whole." With the introduction of the industrialized roller milling at the end of the 19th century, mass refining of grains started. The nutrient-rich germ and bran of grain are removed during processing, making grains faster and somewhat easier to cook, but much less nutritious, now containing predominantly starch. In addition, breaking up the grain removes the fiber and changes how nutrients and, in particular, the starch is digested and absorbed from the stomach; more rapid breakdown and absorption of the starch causes a dramatic glucose surge, so that these processed grains have a high glycemic index. Fortifying white bread with vitamins simply can't match what's lost in the milling process of whole grains.

For years scientists have hypothesized that the higher rates of chronic diseases we have in our country - including heart disease, cancer and inflammatory diseases - are due in part to a diet full of processed foods. The evidence continues to mount that whole grain consumption is consistently associated with a reduced risk of atherosclerosis, heart disease and stroke, and is beneficial for diabetes prevention and management; it is also associated with reduced risk of colon cancer.

Shopping for Whole Grain Products

You don't have to go to a health food or specialty store to find whole grains. I loaded my basket with whole grain products at Jane's Market today. Choosing products can be confusing, because some of the labeling can be misleading.

Start by looking for products that are "100% whole grain." Some products are starting to use the Whole Grain Council Label. Look for



at least 16g per serving - with less than that, there is probably a large portion of processed grains added.

If the packaging doesn't specify 100% whole grain, look under "Ingredients" - the first ingredients listed should be a whole grain, such as whole wheat, rolled oats, rolled red wheat, barley, wild rice, or brown rice. The ingredients wheat flour, enriched or unbleached wheat flour, semolina flour, durum flour or rice flour signify that it is NOT a whole grain product.

Look carefully at products that use the wording "made with whole grains" instead of 100% whole grain; products can say "made with" even if only a small percentage of the grain is whole grain. Also, "multi grain" does not necessarily mean whole grain. One useful clue also, whole grain products usually will have 3 or more grams of protein per serving; and in cereals you should find at least 3 grams of fiber.

The recommendation is to get 48 grams of whole grains a day - usually the equivalent of 3 portions of whole grain products a day.

Here are some examples of my "best finds" today. "Muesli" made by Hodgson Mill is a great cold or hot cereal, or tasty on yogurt - ingredients read: "Whole grain rolled oats, dried apples, raisins, sunflower kernels, rolled red wheat, rolled barley, rolled rye, flax seed." Yum! (and NO added sugars.)

Oatmeal is easy to make from the big round box or the packets. If you choose the packets, watch the sugar content that's been added - look for less than 12 g. One half cup of the dried oats is 40 grams, so you're well on your way to your daily requirement. If you "just can't handle breakfast" start with Kashi Granola bars and coffee from Mercersburg Market for a great source of whole grain. Jane's also has Kashi cereals - Mountain Medley granola is my favorite - with 33g of whole grains.

The bakery makes pumpernickel and rye bread, both whole grains; and they also carry Pepperidge Farm bread made with whole wheat.

If you've tried whole grain pastas in the past and thought they "tasted like tree bark," try the newer products; there has been much improvement in taste and texture in the last 2 years. Today I found Mueller's whole grain spaghetti - great tasting and 56 g of whole grain - got over the daily 100% at one meal.

It's easy to add half a cup of cooked wheat or rye berries, wild rice, brown rice, or barley (picked up some at the market today) to your favorite canned or homemade soup. If you'll replace your white starches - white flour, white bread, white rice, white pastas - each with whole grain products, you should be able to get the daily recommendation of 48 grams of whole grain in your daily diet and add significant nutritional value and taste to your meals.

It's important to keep in mind that the words "whole grain" are not a green light for endless consumption. Even a whole-wheat doughnut is a doughnut - no amount of whole grains makes up for the 315 calories it packs. Use whole grains as replacements for refined foods you're already eating - NOT additions.

If it feels overwhelming to change too much at once, try replacing one by one, and trying something new every week. It takes 21 days of practice to create a habit; make a commitment to try something whole grain every day for the next 3 weeks; join the 71% of Americans who report that they are switching over to whole grains!

Look for Deb Stepler's article next week to help you with more ideas and recipes for preparing meals with whole grains.