Grains

What is a Grain?

Grains are a food group that includes wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, and barley. There are two types, whole grains and refined grains.

A whole grain contains the healthy kernel, made up of the bran, germ, and endosperm. Once a whole grain is milled, it is referred to as a refined grain. Grains are often milled or ground into flour and other cereal products to give it a smoother texture. Unfortunately, the milling process removes some of the nutrients, including the bran and germ. Without the bran and germ, about 25% of the grain’s protein is lost, along with other important nutrients such as iron and dietary fiber.

Many refined grains are enriched meaning that some of the nutrients are added back. However, enriched grains do not have the same health value as whole grain.

Eat Whole Grains

For a healthier diet, eat three or more servings of whole gains each day. Limit foods made with refined grain.

How do you know if you are eating whole grains? Check the Nutrition Facts label found on the package. Look at the ingredients list. The first ingredient on the label should say “whole grain” or “whole wheat.” If the label reads “100% wheat,” or “stone-ground” it is usually NOT whole grain. Some products may be a mixture of whole and refined grains, so read the label carefully. When comparing brands, also check for the product with the highest % Daily Value of fiber and the lowest sugar and sodium.

Eating healthy is about making the right choices. The table below will help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole Grain</th>
<th>Refined Grain (check label)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown/Wild rice • Whole wheat bread, sandwich buns, and rolls • Oatmeal • Popcorn • Whole wheat pasta • Whole wheat tortillas</td>
<td>White rice • White bread • Corn flakes • Pretzels/crackers • White pasta • Breaded • Flour/corn tortillas</td>
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Health Benefits of Whole Grain

Whole grains do the following:

- Lower the risk of many chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes
- Reduce blood cholesterol levels
- Provide vitamins, minerals, and proteins
- Supply fiber, which is important for bowel function
- Offer high levels of antioxidants
Adding Whole Grains to Your Diet

It’s easy to add whole grains to your diet. Give them a try. Here are some ideas.

- Substitute brown rice instead of white rice.
- Try whole wheat bread for your morning toast instead of white bread.
- Eat hot oatmeal instead of a sugar-coated cereal for breakfast.
- Experiment with recipes that call for flour, such as cookies and muffins. Substitute whole wheat for up to half of the flour.
- Instead of regular bread crumbs, use whole-grain bread crumbs in your next meatloaf, or when coating chicken or fish before baking. (Whole-wheat bread crumbs can be found in most grocery stores.)
- Serve half-white, half-brown rice or half-white, half whole-wheat pasta before making the switch to all whole wheat.
- When snacking, look for whole-grain tortilla chips or substitute popcorn for potato chips.
- Add barley to vegetable soup or stews.
- Whole grains go great with salads. Add whole-wheat croutons, quinoa, barley, and wheatberries.

There is no doubt about it – whole grains are a healthier food option. If you don’t like the taste of wheat bread, try rye bread, which is still healthier than white. Add a small amount of bulgur wheat to stews without affecting the taste. Become creative in your cooking. Experiment.

Once you have compared the Nutrition Facts labels and decide on the products you like, making healthy choices when you shop will take no time at all.

Are you ready for wellness?