



Whole Grains for Health

Eating more whole grains is good for your health. Many studies over the past decade have shown that eating more foods like whole grain breads and cereals, and brown rice may be associated with a lower risk of some cancers, stroke, heart disease, and possibly obesity. However, switching to whole grains isn't as easy as it sounds. There are many more available choices in the "refined" grains category than in whole grain category. This is because consumers have become used to refined grains ever since manufacturers started removing the outer husk and the germ from the grain. This process – known as "refinement" – makes breads, crackers, and other grain based foods lighter in texture and taste.

Unfortunately, refining grains also takes away the fiber and the germ of the grain, which contains most of the nutrients. And while manufacturers usually add back some of the lost vitamins in a process called "enriching", many nutrients are left out. So "refined, enriched wheat flour" is lacking when it comes to many disease-fighting vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals.

Just because it's brown, doesn't mean it's a whole grain!

Check out the bread aisle in the grocery store and you will notice loaves of healthy looking dark breads with names like "Health Bread" or "Wheat Bread". But if you don't read the fine print, you could get fooled into buying a refined bread masquerading as its healthier counterpart.

You may also see crackers, cereals, and breads *made with whole wheat*. But this can mean that only a small amount of whole grain flour was actually used. The only way to be sure that these products are truly packed with whole grain goodness is to read the ingredients list. The first ingredient should say *whole grain* or *whole wheat* – the word "whole" is the key. If the first ingredient is *enriched wheat flour* or simply *wheat flour*, it is not a whole grain.

Making the Switch

Making the switch to more whole grains isn't always a pleasant experience, as everyone doesn't like the way whole grains taste. But not everything you eat has to be a whole grain. It's a good idea to start off with the new multi-grain pastas, which are sort of half refined and half whole. Then try a few different brands of whole grain bread or go to a bakery for fresh-baked – you'll find one you like. Try brown rice and even some new grains like quinoa, which cooks in only 15 minutes and is delicious. There are lots of whole grain cereals – including everyone's favorite, oatmeal – that taste great and are a quick and easy way to "up" your whole grain servings. Look for whole grain crackers and English muffins that are quite tasty. Shoot for three servings a day (example: oatmeal at breakfast, whole grain bread sandwich at lunch and brown rice at dinner) and read labels carefully to gain the whole grain health advantage!

References

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