WHY ALL THE FUSS ABOUT WHOLE GRAINS AND FIBER?

Science has the answer. You might have heard that a diet high in fruits and vegetables will help you become healthier. Whole grains can also help you get there. So try adding whole grains to your diet, it’s not a fad, it’s science.

Including whole grains in your diet is a great way to clean your arteries of fats, and they keep you feeling full so you avoid over eating. Whole-grain foods are healthy because they contain fiber. A diet high in fiber can help reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes. Fiber causes food to stay in your stomach longer, so you feel full and your blood sugar doesn’t go up as quickly after you eat. Whole grains, such as whole-wheat flour and brown rice, have more fiber than refined white flour and white rice.

STUDIES* SHOW THAT EATING WHOLE GRAINS INSTEAD OF REFINED GRAINS LOWERS THE RISK OF:

- Stroke by 30 percent to 36 percent
- type 2 diabetes by 21 percent to 30 percent
- heart disease by 25 percent to 28 percent
- Helps you maintain a healthy weight

ACCORDING TO RECENT STUDIES* WHOLE GRAINS ALSO:

- Reduce risk of asthma
- Helps you have healthier carotid arteries.
- Reduces risk of inflammatory disease.
- Decreases risk for colorectal cancer.
- Helps you achieve a healthy blood pressure.
- Also decreases gum disease and tooth loss
- Fiber plays a critical role in gastro-intestinal health. Your GI tract is 24 feet long and needs to be kept clean. Fiber from whole grains helps keep you “regular”.

Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, corn, or another cereal is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal and grits are all grain products. There are two main types of grain products: whole grains and refined grains.

- Whole grains contain the entire grain – the bran, germ and endosperm. Examples include whole wheat, oats/oatmeal, rye, barley, corn, popcorn, brown rice, wild rice, buckwheat, triticale, bulgur (cracked wheat), millet, quinoa, and sorghum.

- Refined grains have been milled (ground into flour or meal) which results in the bran and germ being removed. This gives grains a finer texture and improves their shelf life. This process removes some important nutrients, including B-vitamins, iron and dietary fiber. Some examples of refined grains are wheat flour, enriched bread and white rice.
Most refined grains are enriched, which means that some of the B vitamins and iron are added back after processing. Fiber, however, is not added back to enriched grains. Some examples of enriched grains are wheat flour, enriched bread and white rice.

**GRAINS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT SOURCES OF MANY NUTRIENTS:**

It’s important to include a variety of grains in your eating plan because grains differ in their nutrient content. Whole grains can be a good source of fiber, but refined grains usually are not. Whole grains are consumed in the United States either as a single food (e.g., wild rice, popcorn) or as an ingredient in a multi-ingredient food (e.g., in multi-grain breads).

Whole grains cannot be identified by the color of the food. Bread, for example, can be brown because of molasses or other ingredients, not necessarily because it contains whole grains. That’s why it’s important to read the ingredient list on the food nutrition label. For many whole-grain products, you will see the words “whole” or “whole grain” before the grain’s name in the ingredient list. The whole grain should be the first ingredient listed.

**CHOOSE WHOLE GRAIN FOODS THAT CONTAIN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING INGREDIENTS FIRST ON THE LABEL’S INGREDIENT LIST:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>whole wheat</th>
<th>graham flour</th>
<th>oatmeal</th>
<th>whole oats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brown rice</td>
<td>wild rice</td>
<td>whole-grain corn</td>
<td>popcorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whole-grain barley</td>
<td>whole-wheat bulgur</td>
<td>whole rye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are ALL whole grains.*

When grocery shopping, an easy way to identify healthy food choices is to look for the Heart-Check mark on food labels. **This mark on a whole-grain food product means that it:**

- Is limited in saturated fat, *trans* fat, sodium and sugars.
- More than half of the grains are whole grains.
- Does not contain partially hydrogenated oils.

**DIETARY FIBER**

Dietary fiber is the term for several materials that make up the parts of plants your body can’t digest. Fiber is classified as **soluble** or **insoluble**.

**Soluble fiber**

- Soluble fibers are able to swell and hold water.
- When eaten regularly as part of a diet low in *saturated fat* and *trans fat* soluble fiber has been associated with increased diet quality and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Soluble fiber modestly reduces LDL (“bad”) cholesterol beyond levels achieved by a diet low in saturated and trans fats alone.
- Oats have a greater proportion of soluble fiber than any other grain

**Insoluble fiber**

- Insoluble fiber has been associated with decreased cardiovascular risk and slower progression of cardiovascular disease in high-risk individuals.
Wheat, rye, rice, and most other grains are primarily composed of insoluble fiber. Legumes, beans, and peas are also excellent sources of both soluble and insoluble fiber. Certain fruits and vegetables are better sources of both soluble and insoluble fiber than others. Many processed oat bran and wheat bran products (such as muffins, chips, waffles) may be made with refined grains, not the whole grain. They also may be high in sodium, added sugars and saturated fat. Read labels carefully.

### GETTING THE RIGHT AMOUNT COUNTS

The American Heart Association recommends eating 6 to 8 servings of grain foods a day, and at least half of your grains are whole grains.

We recommend obtaining fiber from foods rather than from fiber supplements. Check the Nutrition Facts label on food packages to find foods with a higher amount of fiber. **The daily value for fiber is 25 grams of fiber each day for a 2,000 calorie diet.**

### SERVING SIZE

The following count as 1 ounce-equivalent (or 1 serving) of whole grains:

- 1 slice whole-grain bread (such as 100% whole-wheat bread)
- 1 cup ready-to-eat, whole-grain cereal
- 1/2 cup cooked whole-grain cereal, brown rice, or whole-wheat pasta
- 5 whole-grain crackers
- 3 cups unsalted, air-popped popcorn
- 1 6-inch whole-wheat tortilla

### FOUR SIMPLE STEPS TO GET ALL THE FIBER YOU NEED:

- Eat 3 or more pieces of fruit each day
- Eat 3 or more ½ cup servings of vegetables each day
- Eat 6 or more servings of whole-grain breads, cereals, brown rice, oatmeal, etc each day
- Several times a week choose: pinto, garbanzo, kidney, navy, lima beans, plus peas and corn

*From the American Heart Association website: updated August 2015*