

Harvesting the Benefits of Whole Grains

Karen Randall, RDN, CSO, LD



Americans eat plenty of refined grains found in white bread, buns and rolls but fall short in consumption of fiber-rich, health-boosting whole grains. For overall good health, it is recommended that at least half of your grains be whole grains

and that you should strive for at least three servings of whole grains per day.

There is strong evidence that whole grains lower your risk of developing colorectal cancer and may help prevent other types of cancer. Eating whole grains also promotes a healthy heart and reduces your risk of type 2 diabetes. Additionally, some of the various fibers and phytochemicals in whole grains can feed healthy gut bacteria.

The Whole Grain

The whole grain is the entire seed (also known as the kernel) of a plant. It consists of three parts: the bran, the germ and the endosperm.

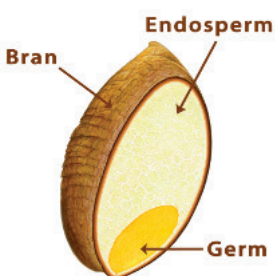


Image Source:
Whole Grains Council

The **bran** is the multi-layered outer shell of the kernel and contains antioxidants, fiber, B vitamins and trace minerals.

The **germ** is the section of the seed that once germinated can produce another plant. It is a

concentrated source of vitamin E, B vitamins, magnesium, zinc and healthy fats.

The **endosperm** is the largest portion of the kernel and consists mainly of starchy carbohydrates and small amounts of protein, vitamins and minerals.

Some examples of whole grains include whole-wheat flour, brown rice and brown rice flour, rolled oats, all types of oatmeal, wild rice, bulgar, barley, quinoa, millet and buckwheat.

Non-Whole Grains

Refined grains, such as all-purpose flour and white bread, are whole grains that have been stripped of most or all of the bran and germ. This process, which is called milling, leaves only the endosperm and eliminates the natural fiber and most of the vitamins and healthy fats.

Enriched grains are refined grains that have some or many of the nutrients, such as the B vitamins and iron, lost in milling added back. White bread, white flour, white rice and white pasta are examples of enriched grains.

Fortified grains are refined grains with added nutrients, usually vitamins and minerals, that don't naturally occur in the grains. The most common fortified grains are found in breakfast cereals with the addition of vitamins A and D, B vitamins, folic acid, zinc, iron and calcium.



Kneading Consumer Confusion About Food Labels and Color

Food labels are often confusing for shoppers who are looking for nutritious whole-grain products. For example, statements like “made with whole grains” imply the inclusion of whole grains, but don’t be fooled. This claim means it contains some whole grains but is mostly comprised of refined grains.

Other products will advertise whole grains on the packaging, but the product still may not be the healthiest choice. Examples of this include whole-grain cookies, crackers and chips. Other labels such as 100% wheat, multi-grain and seven-grain are not necessarily whole grains and can be misleading.

Consumers can also be confused with color. Dark-colored bread and cereals are often associated with being whole grains, but the color does not necessarily mean it is whole grain. For example, in the last 10 years, 100% whole wheat white bread has been introduced to the market, which is made from white wheat and has a milder flavor. This is a great option for those who prefer the flavor of white bread.

Slicing Through the Product Label

Looking for a whole-grain stamp on products can be a big help to quicken the shopping experience. The market for using the stamp is growing, and consumers are frequently seeking it out as they try to eat more nutritious foods.

Unfortunately, the whole-grain stamp is not present on the packaging of all whole-grain foods. In this case, you need to reference the product’s ingredient list. Ingredients are listed in descending order of quantity. Look for the whole grain (brown rice, quinoa or oats) as the first ingredient or for the word “whole” in front of a grain of flour.

While there are differences in the three labels shown, you can feel confident, if the label is present, that the product includes whole grains.



Image Source: Whole Grains Council

Down to the Last Crumb

Now you know how to find whole grains when you’re shopping and can apply this knowledge to improve your health by including at least three servings of whole grains in your daily diet. Below are some ideas to get you started.

- Try whole-wheat pasta instead of white pasta (or use half whole wheat and half white).
- Use whole-wheat panko crumbs in place of Italian bread crumbs.
- Choose whole-grain crackers or popcorn for snacks.
- For breakfast, try whole-wheat pancakes, whole-wheat waffles, whole-grain cereal or oatmeal.
- Use whole-wheat flour for some of the total flour needed in baked goods but no more than 50% of the total flour as this makes them heavy and dense. The balance of the flour should remain as all-purpose flour.



Featured Recipe

Quinoa & Chia Oatmeal Mix

For complete recipe and nutrition facts: [Eating Well](#)

Preparation Time: **10 minutes**

Total Time: **10 minutes**

Servings: **12**



INGREDIENTS

2 cups old-fashioned oats

1 cup rolled wheat and/or barley flakes (see tip)

1 cup quinoa

1 cup dried fruit, such as raisins, cranberries and/or chopped apricots

½ cup chia or hemp seeds

1 tsp ground cinnamon

¾ tsp salt

INSTRUCTIONS

Hot Cereal Dry Mix

- 1. Combine** oats, wheat and/or barley flakes, dried fruit, seeds and salt in an airtight container.

Hot Cereal (Makes One Cup)

- 1. Combine** 1/3 cup of the dry mix with 1¼ cups water (or milk) in a saucepan and bring to a **boil**.
- 2. Reduce** heat, partially **cover** and then let **simmer, stirring** occasionally, until thickened (about 12 to 15 minutes).
- 3.** Let stand, covered, for five minutes.
- 4. Stir** in a sweetener of your choice and **top** with nuts and/or more dried fruit, if desired.

Serving Size (1/3 cup dry mix): 196 calories; protein 6.2g; carbohydrates 35.5g; dietary fiber 6.1g; sugars 8.2g; fat 4.2g; saturated fat 0.5g; sodium 148.53mg.

TIPS

- To make ahead, store the dry mix in an airtight container for up to one month.
- Rolled barley and wheat flakes are steamed, dried and rolled flat whole grains. They can be cooked to make a bowl of hot cereal or used in place of rolled oats in most recipes. They're usually located near other whole-grain cereals.

