Eating Whole Grains

What Are Grains?

Cereal grains are small, hard and edible dry seeds that grow on grass-like plants called cereals. They are a staple food in most countries, and provide more food energy worldwide than any other food group.

The most common grains are corn (or maize), rice, and wheat. Other grains that are consumed in smaller amounts include barley, oats, sorghum, millet, and rye. Then there are “grain-like” cereals like quinoa and buckwheat, which are seeds.

Foods made from grains include breads, pasta, breakfast cereals, tortillas, cereal bars, cakes, pastries and cookies. Many other products may have grain-based ingredients such as breaded fish and chicken.

Is multigrain the same thing as whole grain? Which is the healthier choice?

The term “multigrain” and "whole grain" are not the same. “Whole grain” means that all parts of the grain kernel — the bran, germ and endosperm — are used.

Multigrain means that a food contains more than one type of grain. It does not mean that any of the grains would be “whole grain.” So whether it is two grains or seven grains, without the words “whole grain” to describe the types of grains used, they are not whole grain.

Whole grain foods are a healthy choice because they contain nutrients, fiber and other healthy plant compounds found naturally in the grain. Look for products that list the first ingredient as "whole wheat," "whole oats" or other whole grain.

Whole grains contain protective antioxidants or phytochemicals in amounts the same or more than in fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants are important for many body functions and reducing the risk of some diseases.

Research continues to discover the benefits of whole grains. We know that the fiber in whole grain helps promote digestive health such as good bowel movements. Studies are linking the use of whole grains with a reduced risk of heart disease, lowering triglycerides, and slowing the buildup of arterial plaque (hardening of the arteries). Whole grains can improve glucose control in diabetes, help you feel more full (which can help with weight control), and reduce the risk of developing certain cancers.
Most Popular Grains

**Wheat** is a popular and very versatile cereal grain. It is a major ingredient in baked goods, pastas, noodles, couscous, bulgur and semolina. Wheat does contain gluten, a protein that can trigger harmful reactions in people that have Celiac Disease. Look for “whole wheat.”

**Rye** is a member of the wheat family. Rye flour comes in several forms such as light, medium, dark, rye meal and pumpernickel. Both light and medium varieties are more refined and not considered whole grain, while dark rye flour, rye meal and pumpernickel flour are more likely to be whole grain. Look for “whole rye.”

**Oats** are among the healthiest whole grains you can eat. They are rich in antioxidants, which have been linked to a reduced risk of colon cancer and lower blood pressure. Oats help aid digestion and nutrient absorption as well as lower “bad” LDL cholesterol and total cholesterol. It is gluten-free.

**Brown rice** is a healthier alternative to white rice because it is a whole grain. It is gluten-free. It has antioxidants that reduce heart disease risk by reducing blood pressure, inflammation and “bad” LDL cholesterol.

**Corn or maize** is a gluten-free staple food world-wide and more is grown than wheat and rice. It contains lots of minerals, B vitamins, and antioxidants. Popcorn is one of the healthiest whole grain snack foods to eat. It is a special type of corn that pops under high heat.

**Quinoa** is a seed that is used like a grain. It has more vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein, healthy fats and fiber than other popular grains. Quinoa is one of the few plant foods that provide complete proteins, which means it contains all nine essential amino acids. This makes it a great option for vegetarians and vegans.

**Even healthier whole grain options:**

Whole grain breads and cereals that are made from **stone ground** wheat or **steel cut** oats are less processed than regular whole grain flours. This can help slow down the digestion of carbohydrates and starches into sugars. This means a slower blood sugar rise to better manage diabetes and provide longer lasting energy and delay hunger.
Products made with whole grains are not necessarily healthier if they contain a lot of added sugar, salt or saturated fats. Some cereals will list whole oats as the first ingredient but contains 10 grams (two teaspoons) of added sugars.

Breads may be made with “sprouted” grains, these are grains and legumes (seeds) that are soaked in water allowing them to germinate. This process increases the nutrient content of the bread and also makes it easier for the nutrients to be absorbed in the body.

The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines recommend that Americans “make at least half their grains whole.” This means most people should consume three or more servings of whole grains each day. However, four, five, even six servings of whole grains daily are not unreasonable.

A serving (or “ounce-equivalent”) of grain is one slice of bread, a cup of plain cold cereal, or 1/2 cup of hot cereal, cooked pasta, rice or other grains. Sixteen (16) grams or more of whole grain ingredients counts as a full serving. This means most Americans need 48 grams or more of whole grains daily.

A growing number of foods are being labeled with information about whole grain content using the Whole Grain Stamp. Foods made only with bran are not whole grain products. Likewise, high fiber does not mean whole grain as other as there are other sources of fiber such inulin from chicory root and psyllium from a plant seed which are used as fiber supplements to help prevent constipation.

Check the ingredient list for “whole grains” among the first ingredients.

100% Stamp - all its grain ingredients are whole grain. Minimum amount is 16 grams (a full serving of whole grain per labeled serving).

50% + Stamp - at least half of its grain ingredients are whole grain. Minimum amount of 8 grams (a half serving of whole grain per labeled serving).

Basic Stamp - contains at least 8 grams (a half serving of whole grain, but may contain more refined grain than whole per labeled serving).

Each stamp shows how many grams of whole grain ingredients are in a serving of the product. When you look at stamped products on your grocery shelves, you will notice many different gram amounts. This is the whole grain content of a serving of that specific product. If a product contains large amounts of whole grain (23g, 37g, 41g, etc.) but also contains extra bran, germ, or refined flour, it will use the 50%+ Stamp or the Basic Stamp (and not the 100% Stamp).
Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments.
For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304

**Brown Rice Dessert**

Ingredients:
- 1 cup cooked brown rice, chilled
- 1 cup non-fat yogurt, plain or vanilla
- 1 cup unsweetened or regular applesauce
- ¼ cup raisins
- 1 (8-ounce) can crushed pineapple in juice

Directions:
- Put aside ¼ cup of drained pineapple.
- Mix chilled rice, yogurt, applesauce, raisins and pineapple together in a medium sized bowl.
- Serve in small dishes.
- Top with remaining crushed pineapple.

Makes six servings

Source: Adapted from Eating Smart, Being Active, California EFNEP and Colorado EFNEP

**Homemade Granola**

Ingredients:
- 4 Tablespoons honey
- 2 Tablespoons canola oil
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 4 Tablespoons sliced or chopped almonds
- Non-stick cooking spray
- ½ cup dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots, dates, or prunes)

Directions:
- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- In a large bowl, add honey, oil, and cinnamon. Whisk with a fork. Add oats and almonds. Stir until well-coated with honey mixture.
- Coat a baking sheet with non-stick cooking spray. Spread oat mixture evenly onto sheet. Bake until lightly browned, about 10–15 minutes. Stir every 5 minutes to cook evenly.
- Watch closely to be sure granola does not burn. Remove from oven. Let cool completely. Transfer cooled granola to a medium bowl. Stir in dried fruit.
- Makes 9 - 1/3 cup servings

Source: Cooking Matters, Chef Joyce Roland

**References:**
- [https://wholegrainscouncil.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/WGC-CookingWholeGrains_0.pdf](https://wholegrainscouncil.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/WGC-CookingWholeGrains_0.pdf)
- [https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/whole-grain-foods#section3](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/whole-grain-foods#section3)
- [https://www.npr.org/2013/03/01/173242994/seeking-a-grain-of-truth-in-whole-grain-labels](https://www.npr.org/2013/03/01/173242994/seeking-a-grain-of-truth-in-whole-grain-labels)
- [https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/grains-good-or-bad#section1](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/grains-good-or-bad#section1)

**Do you have a questions or concerns about what to eat?**
If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

**Check out our website for nutrition resources:**
[http://cceschendata.org/nutrition-for-seniors](http://cceschendata.org/nutrition-for-seniors)

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