

Hearty Grains Help the Diet

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Foods rich in fiber, such as whole grains, are part of a healthy diet and provide many health benefits. Whole grain foods may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, high blood cholesterol, certain types of cancers and type 2 diabetes. Other health benefits include reducing the incidence of constipation and diverticulosis and helping with weight management.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating the equivalent of six ounces of grain products every day for people on a 2000 calorie diet. At least half of this amount should be whole grains. You may need to eat more or less depending on your calorie level. Visit www.MyPyramid.gov to find your personalized MyPyramid according to age, gender and activity level.

How much is six ounces? A one-ounce equivalent is the amount of food counted as equal to a one-ounce slice of bread. Equivalents include one cup ready-to-eat cereal and one-half cup cooked rice, cereal or pasta.

Other amounts that count as one ounce equivalents:

1 small (6") flour or corn tortilla

1 "mini" bagel

1/2 English muffin

1 small (2 1/2" diameter) muffin

3 cups popcorn

However, most portions we see and eat are much larger than one ounce. For example, these larger portions are more common:

4 ounce equivalents: large bagel, 12" tortilla, microwave bag of popcorn (popped)

3 ounce equivalents: 3 pancakes (4 1/2" diameter), muffin (3 1/2" diameter)

2 ounce equivalents: 3" biscuit

There are two subgroups of grain foods: whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains are made from the entire grain seed, which includes the bran, germ and endosperm. Examples of whole grain foods include whole wheat, whole oats, oatmeal, whole grain corn, popcorn, brown and wild rice, whole rye, whole grain barley, buckwheat, tritacale, bulgur, millet, quinoa and sorghum.

Refined grains have been milled to remove the bran and germ, resulting in a finer texture and improved shelf life. This process also removes much of the B vitamins, iron and dietary fiber. Most refined grains are enriched by adding back certain B vitamins and iron. However, the fiber is not added back to most enriched grains. Refined grains include white flour, white bread, white rice, white sandwich buns and rolls, corn or flour tortillas, degermed cornmeal, crackers, grits, noodles, pretzels, and pitas.

When selecting grains, choose foods with a whole grain ingredient listed first on the label's ingredient list. (Ingredients are listed in descending order of weight, from most to least.) Color does not indicate

a whole grain. Bread can be brown because molasses or other ingredients have been added. The ingredient list will specify whole grains.

Be cautious of the wording on grain food packages. Foods are usually not whole-grain products if labeled with these words: multi-grain, stone-ground, 100% wheat, cracked wheat, seven-grain and bran.

Follow these easy ways to incorporate whole grains into your diet:

- Replace current refined grain products with whole grains. For example, eat whole wheat bread rather than white bread.
- Stock your pantry with whole grain items, such as whole wheat cereals, brown rice, low fat whole wheat crackers and whole grain breads and rolls.
- Eat cooked oatmeal or whole grain cereals for breakfast. Try whole wheat toast or whole grain muffins for breakfast on the go.
- Eat brown rice rather than white rice. Try it in stir fry or make stuffing for baked green peppers or tomatoes.
- Make macaroni and cheese or spaghetti using whole wheat pasta.
- Add whole grains to mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soup or stews and bulgur wheat in casseroles.
- Make meatloaf using whole grain bread or cracker crumbs.
- Rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole grain cereal can be used as breading for baked chicken, fish or eggplant parmesan.
- Substitute whole wheat or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancakes, waffles, muffins or other flour-based recipes.

Sources: A. Henneman and B. Benes, "Meet the Grain Group Tips for Using MyPyramid," University of Nebraska Extension and J. Hunter and K. Cason, "Whole Grains," Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service.