

MAKE SOME GRAINS WITH WHOLE GRAINS

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Are you puzzled as to what constitutes a whole grain? With so many foods to select from, it can be confusing. First, it is important to understand what makes a grain whole. Whole grains contain three key components – the bran, germ and endosperm. The bran is the hard outer layer of the grain and is rich in dietary fiber and contains significant quantities of starch, protein, vitamins and dietary minerals. Wheat bran is very effective in treating constipation.

The germ is the “heart” of the kernel and has a concentrated source of several essential nutrients including Vitamin E, folic acid, phosphorus, thiamine, zinc and magnesium, as well as essential fatty acids. The endosperm surrounds the germ and provides nutrition in the form of starch and it can also contain oils and protein.

Common whole grain products include oatmeal, popcorn, brown rice, whole wheat flour, sprouted grains and whole wheat bread. Other examples are amaranth, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, corn, millet, quinoa, rye, oats and wild rice.

In contrast, during the processing of grains, the germ or bran may be removed and only the endosperm is retained. This constitutes a refined grain. For example, most of the barley that is used for food production in the U.S. has kernels covered with a very tough inedible hull. This outer layer must be removed before the kernel can be used for human food. Barley tends to be difficult to dehull and generally is pearled. The pearling process abrades away the outer surfaces of the grain with an abrasive surface and removes some of the bran, so it is not considered a whole grain. If the process just dehulls the barley and the bran layer is left intact, then it is a whole grain.

Oats used to make oatmeal are processed either by flattening to produce rolled oats or steamed and flattened to create “quick oats” are considered “whole grains” because they contain all of their bran, germ and endosperm.

Here are a few tips on how to identify whole grain products when shopping. Typically if the first ingredient lists “whole wheat”, “wholemeal” or “whole corn”, the

product is a whole grain food. Whereas, terms such as “enriched” or “bromated” among others, could indicate that the food is refined and lacks a key component. Another way to identify whole grain in the food is to look at the Nutritional Facts Label and check if the item contains dietary fiber. If it contains a significant amount, it most likely contains whole grains. Don't be fooled about the color of the bread. Many breads are colored brown (often with molasses) and made to look like whole grain. Additionally, some food manufacturers make foods with whole grain ingredients, but they are not the dominant ingredient.

As for health benefits, whole grains are believed to be nutritionally superior to refined grains. Whole grains are richer in dietary fiber, antioxidants, protein, dietary minerals (including magnesium, manganese, phosphorus and selenium) and vitamins (including niacin, Vitamin B6 and Vitamin E). Whole grains typically have up to four times more dietary fiber than refined grains. Many health studies have shown that whole grains have numerous cardiovascular benefits and reduce the incidence of some forms of cancer, digestive diseases, gum diseases, heart diseases, diabetes and obesity.

Make a wise selection and look for whole grains.