



Parents Ask

Nutrition Chat with ARAMARK Dietitians

The Goodness of Whole Grains

PARENT: It seems that new whole grain products are being introduced everyday. What are whole grains and why are they good for you?

DIETITIAN: Whole grain products are made with grains that are intact. Products that are not whole grain use processed flour with some nutritious parts of the grain removed. These products are then enriched, meaning some of the nutrients that were lost during processing are added back into them. Enriched products do not provide the same nutritional value as whole grain products. In addition to fiber, whole grains provide a variety of nutrients such as B vitamins, magnesium, iron, zinc, copper, plant sterols, and antioxidants. Whole grains have been linked to numerous health benefits such as helping to lower cholesterol, reducing risk for heart disease and certain cancers, managing weight, and also keeping digestive tract healthy. Get the benefits of whole grains by including at least 3 servings in your diet each day.

PARENT: I'd like to start eating more whole grains, how can I use them in every day meals?

DIETITIAN: It can be easy to include whole grains in your everyday meals. Simply substitute whole grain versions in place of "white" versions like bread, rolls, pasta, and rice. You can also switch over to whole grain snacks like whole grain crackers and pretzels, oatmeal granola bars, and even popcorn. There are also many other lesser-known whole grains that can be used as sides or in soups, pastas or salads like quinoa, amaranth, and bulgur. For some whole grain recipes visit <http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org/recipes>.

PARENT: Are quick cook items like instant oatmeal and brown rice still considered whole grains and are they as healthy as their original slower-cook versions?

DIETITIAN: Even though these quick-cook items are slightly more processed than their original versions, they are still made from and considered whole grains. The nutritional value of quick-cook whole grains is about the same as their long-cook counterparts, making them a convenient, healthy choice.

PARENT: I have a hard time getting my kids to eat whole grain foods, are there any kid-friendly products out there?

DIETITIAN: Many breakfast cereals that kids love are now whole grain. You can also try topping oatmeal with fresh fruit or honey to make it more appealing. Try thin-sliced 100% whole wheat bread which is less coarse than some other whole grain versions. If that doesn't work, whole wheat white bread is now available and they won't notice the difference, especially when making peanut butter and jelly or grilled cheese. Whole-wheat pasta with marinara sauce is another healthy option for kids. Kids can also get whole grains in snacks like whole grain crackers or pretzels, granola bars, popcorn, or even rice pudding made with brown rice.

PARENT: How do I find products that are whole grain when shopping?

DIETITIAN: Many products that appear to be whole grain really aren't. Dark colors or labels that say "multigrain" don't necessarily mean that the product is whole grain. The best way to identify whole grain products is to read food labels. One of the first few ingredients should say "whole" before the name of the grain such as whole wheat or whole oats. You can also look for the whole grain stamp on products, which guarantees at least a half serving of whole grains. Food items that contain 51% whole grain by weight can display a health claim on their label stating that, "diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods and low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers." Don't go by appearance alone; be sure to read labels to make sure you are getting a true whole grain product.



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PARENT: How do I get whole grains into my diet while eating out?

DIETITIAN: Many restaurants now offer whole grain foods on their menus today. Many Asian restaurants offer the choice of brown rice. Italian restaurants may offer whole wheat pasta and bread. At Mexican restaurants ask for corn or whole wheat tortillas. Order your sandwiches on whole grain bread, whole wheat rolls, or whole wheat tortilla wraps. Additionally, look for barley, wild rice, or even quinoa which is now starting to appear on restaurant menus.

PARENT: I eat many fresh fruits and vegetables, do I still need to be concerned about getting fiber from whole grains?

DIETITIAN: Whole grains not only are a good source of fiber but also provide other important nutrients like magnesium, vitamin E, antioxidants, plant sterols, and phytochemicals. The combination of these beneficial nutrients as part of a balanced diet can provide numerous health benefits. Making whole grains a part of your healthy diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease, some cancers, and type 2 diabetes.

PARENT: I do not like the taste and texture of whole grain bread, is whole white wheat bread just as good?

DIETITIAN: Whole white wheat bread is made from a lighter colored wheat or “albino” wheat. This type of wheat results in a smoother texture and taste and the same color as white bread. Since it is still made from whole wheat it has the same nutritional benefits as its darker counterpart making it a healthy option for adults or kids who do not like dark whole grain bread.

PARENT: Do you have any tips that will make it easy to get at least 3 servings of whole grains per day?

DIETITIAN: Getting 3 servings of whole grains every day may be easier than you think. A serving of whole grain is a slice of bread, a ½ cup of cooked whole grain pasta or rice, or 1 cup of whole grain cereal. Aim to get at least one serving of whole grains at each meal and you will easily be able to reach your goal. For example start your day with a bowl of whole grain cereal or oatmeal. For lunch have a sandwich on whole grain bread or whole grain pita and have brown rice to accompany your dinner.

PARENT: I am trying to lose weight- will eating a lot of carbohydrates like whole grain bread and pasta cause me to gain weight?

DIETITIAN: If you eat more calories than you burn you will gain weight no matter where the calories come from. Whole grains are a good source of fiber which has been shown to slow digestion and keep you feeling fuller longer. Including whole grains in your healthy diet may keep you from overeating and help manage your weight in the long run. Whole grains are also a healthy part of a balanced diet because they provide you with many health promoting nutrients. Talk to your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you.

PARENT: I have type 2 diabetes, should whole grains be a part of my diet?

DIETITIAN: Whole grains are an important part of almost everyone’s diet. In addition to health promoting nutrients, whole grains contain fiber which has been shown to slow digestion and prevent rapid rises in blood sugar which can be beneficial in helping people manage diabetes. Studies also show that whole grains can reduce risk for diabetes by preventing rapid rise in blood glucose and blood insulin levels. The fiber in whole grains has also been shown to help reduce risk for obesity and obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes. Talk to your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you.

Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives. Since everyone’s health history and nutritional needs are so different, please be sure to talk with your own doctor and registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you or your child.