

## The Wonderful World of Whole Grains

Foods from grains like wheat, rice and oats are the foundation of a healthy diet. Grains form the base of the Food Guide Pyramid and provide important nutrients. Whole grain foods are the best choice because they have not been refined, so they have more fiber and certain nutrients.

### What is a Whole Grain?

Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel (rich in fiber and other nutrients) while refined or “enriched” grains have the outer covering and germ removed, leaving only the starchy part. By law, refined grains must be “enriched” with B vitamins and iron since most of these nutrients are lost in processing. However some important nutrients and fiber are still lacking in refined grains.

### What is the Advantage of Eating Whole Grains?

Whole grains are superior to refined grains because they include fiber, vitamins, minerals and many other important nutritional components. Eating plenty of whole grains is important for digestive health and may reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. Surveys show that most Americans (children and adults) are lucky to consume even one serving of whole grains daily.

### What are some Examples of Whole Grains?

- Products made with 100% whole wheat flour, such as breads, cereals, pancakes and waffles.
- Brown rice
- Oatmeal
- Bulgur (cracked wheat)
- Whole oats
- Whole grain corn
- Graham flour

Read the Nutrition Facts Label on foods in the grocery store and look for grain products with the above ingredients listed first on the label. Do not assume that a bread that is brown and labeled “wheat bread” is actually a whole grain product. Often these breads contain little or no whole wheat flour but do have added coloring “caramel coloring” to make the bread brown.

## Is it Important for Children to Eat Whole Grain Foods?

Children benefit from the nutrient boost that whole grain products provide. Most American children eat very few whole grain products. Children who are offered whole grain products at an early age will adjust to the coarser texture of whole grain breads and cereals. Examples of whole-grain kid-friendly cereals include: Wheat Chex, Wheaties, Cheerios, and Shredded Wheat. Try substituting whole wheat flour for part of the white flour in recipes. When introducing whole grains try starting with 10% whole grain flours and gradually increase the amount each time the recipe is prepared.

Adrienne Dorf, MPH, RD, CD  
Nutrition Consultant  
Child Care Health Program  
Public Health, Seattle and King County  
2124 4th Ave, Suite 400  
Seattle, WA 98121  
(206) 205-9026  
FAX: (206) 296-2750  
[adrienne.dorf@kingcounty.gov](mailto:adrienne.dorf@kingcounty.gov)