

What's New About Whole Grain Goodness?

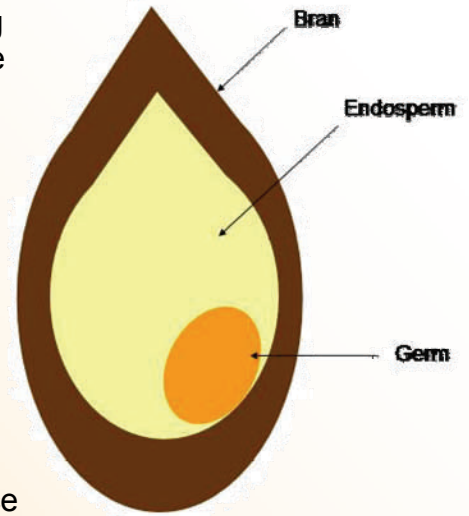
The most influential factors in purchasing bread in the US are price and whole grain content, in that order. Though consumers are making decisions on the **health benefits of whole grains**, an article in the 2011 summer issue of The American Dietetic Association SCAN's Pulse states that "our knowledge about whole grains is far from complete."

Whole grain refers to the three components of a grain...bran, endosperm and germ. Milling removes part of the fibrous bran and nutrient-dense germ, resulting in products commonly known as "refined".

Whole grain does not necessarily equate to high fiber because the natural content of grain varies by species. Wheat carries mostly insoluble fiber, oats and barley are high in soluble fiber, rice and corn have minimal amounts of fiber. Once again we see why it is important to read labels. Because the whole grain should also be fiber rich for maximum benefit.

Did you know that grinding grains into flour helps increase absorption of these simple carbohydrates and other nutrients because the surface area is greatly increased? And that can be beneficial for grains like flax which are hard to digest in their "whole" form, and therefore provide more nutrition when ground. If the pulverized components of the grain are added back into the final product, it can be labeled whole grain. Refined wheat, however, is enriched with folic acid and other nutrients that may be lacking in our diets.

Getting enough whole grains? A general rule of thumb is to make **at least half of your grains whole**. There is a host of evidence that consumption of 3 servings/day of **whole grains helps reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease**. It is important that health claims for whole grains are **evidence-based**, sustainable, and officially validated. Current scientific evidence indicates that whole grains play an important role in lowering the risk of chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, and also contribute to body weight management and gastrointestinal health. Intervention studies **have not yet proven** a link between *whole grains* and weight loss, but they do have evidence that links eating whole grains to having less visceral abdominal fat.



Industry is pushing forward with new products that make it easier for us to reach the public health goal of 3 whole grain servings/day. However we should look at the overall nutrition value of the final product. Triple cheese, sausage pizza with a whole grain crust may not be the healthiest choice!

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