

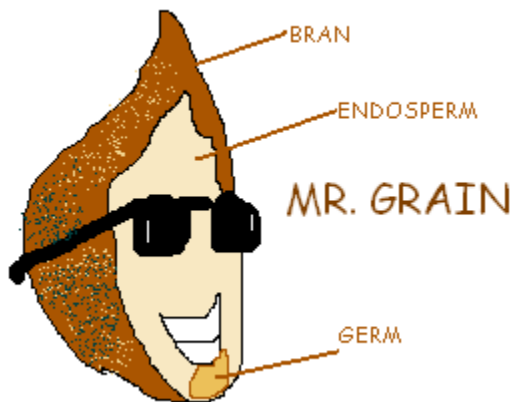
## December Health Tip: Trade out Refined Grains for Whole Grains

### December Health Comments

Adopting healthy nutritional habits doesn't have to be overwhelming. Simply making a few small changes to your diet can have a significant impact on your health. An example of such a change is replacing refined grains in your diet with whole grain. Whole grains are important sources of fiber, phytonutrients and key vitamins and minerals such as potassium and selenium.

First, what is a whole grain?

In its natural state, a whole grain is the whole seed of a plant. Farmers usually call this a kernel. There are three main parts of a whole grain: the bran, germ and endosperm.



The bran is the outer surface of grain. It contains B vitamins, protein, fiber, and a host of antioxidants. The germ is a grain's embryo. If not harvested, this is where the sprout of a new grain plant will originate. The germ contains B vitamins, protein, minerals and healthy fats. The largest part of a grain is the endosperm. This middle part contains starchy carbohydrates, some protein, along with a few vitamins and minerals. Now, I'm sure you are wondering why you had to suffer through that biology lesson. Here's the deal: it takes all three parts described above for a grain to be considered "whole."

During the refining process, the bran and germ are removed, taking along with them nearly 25 percent of the grain's protein, much of its fiber, and many other key nutrients. Most commercially-produced cakes, cookies, breads, pasta, crackers and cereal are made with refined grains. Such products are often identified as white – for example, white flour, white bread or white rice.

There are numerous health benefits to consuming whole grains instead of refined grains.

Consumption of whole grains has been linked to several of the following health benefits<sup>1</sup>:

- Decrease in risk factors for cardiovascular disease
- Decrease in LDL cholesterol and triglycerides
- Reduction of inflammatory disease risk
- Healthier blood pressure levels
- Lower fasting blood sugar levels
- Improved insulin sensitivity

So now that you know a little more about whole grains, how can you make sure you are including them in your diet?

First, read your labels! Many food companies have taken note of an increasing number of people looking to improve their health by adding whole grains to their diet. Realizing that whole grain products are healthier than their refined grain counterparts, some food companies add molasses and caramel coloring to their bread products to make them appear as whole wheat. They may even label their product as white wheat, wheat bread, etc. To make sure you are purchasing a true whole grain product, it is wise to take a moment and glance at the ingredient listings on food packaging. True whole grain ingredients should be described as containing whole grain (name of grain), whole wheat, whole (other grain), stone-ground whole (name of grain), brown rice, oats or wheat berries. Ingredients such as enriched flours, bran or wheat germ are not indicative of whole grain products.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that at least half of all the grains you eat come from whole grains<sup>2</sup>. A good rule of thumb is to try to consume at least three servings per day. Common white grain alternatives to incorporate into your diet include whole wheat pasta, whole wheat sandwich bread and buns, whole wheat pizza crust, oatmeals and whole wheat cereals.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Food Groups/Grain: "Why is it important to eat grains, especially whole grains?"*, [http://www.choosemyplate.gov/foodgroups/grains\\_why.html](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/foodgroups/grains_why.html)

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. "Chapter 4: Foods and Nutrients to Increase."*, <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/Chapter4.pdf>