

Amber waves of whole grains

Whole grains are part of a healthy eating plan. Whole grains are foods such as whole wheat, brown rice, whole grain corn, and oatmeal — they contain the entire grain kernel.

But, if there are whole grains, does that mean there are half grains, too?

Not exactly — refined grains such as enriched wheat flour and white rice have had most of the bran and some of the germ of the kernel removed.

The bran of the grain is the outer shell which protects the seed and is a good source of fiber, B vitamins and minerals. The germ provides nourishment to the seed and so is a source of antioxidants, vitamin E and B vitamins. Since these nutrients are all important for our good health, it is easy to understand why it is recommended to make at least half of our grains, whole grains.

Why are whole grains important for us?

- They are a good source of the nutrients listed above.
- They help with digestion, decreasing the risk of bowel disorders.
- They can reduce the risk of many health problems like cancer, heart disease, high cholesterol, stroke, high blood pressure, obesity and Type 2 diabetes.
- They may help with weight maintenance.

How do you know if a food is a whole grain? Read the ingredient list on the label and look for the words “whole” or “whole grain.” Here are some whole grains that you may find listed: Whole wheat Whole oats Whole grain or pearl barley Whole grain corn Buckwheat Triticale Millet Oatmeal Brown or wild rice Whole rye Bulgar (cracked wheat)

Popcorn (choking risk for children under 4 yrs.)

Look for foods that have one of these whole grains as the first ingredient. Some foods sound like they have whole grains, because the label says wheat bread or multigrain bread. Always check the ingredient list to be sure that the first ingredient is one of those above. Words and phrases that do not mean the food is whole grain are: wheat flour, enriched flour, white rice, degerminated cornmeal, made with whole grain, 100% wheat, multigrain, stone ground, and pumpernickel.

How much is a serving for adults?

Cereals = 1/2 cup cooked or 3/4 cup of ready-to-eat. Breads = 1 slice Tortillas, muffins, waffles, pancakes = 1 small Crackers = 5 to 7 small crackers

Popcorn = 3 cups (choking risk for children under 4 years of age).

Bagel or pita bread = 1/2 or 1 small

Rice or pasta = 1/2 cup cooked.

Ideas for eating whole grains:

- Choose a ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook whole grain cereal for breakfast.
- Pour some dry, bitesize cereals into a bag for a snack.
- Grab a whole grain cereal bar for a snack.
- Read the labels of the grains in your home, like bread, tortillas, bagels, pita bread, rolls and crackers. If they aren't whole grains look for a replacement that is, the next time you shop.
- Try muffins made with whole wheat or rolled oats, or cornbread made with whole grain cornmeal.
- Snack on low fat whole grain crackers, popcorn, baked tortilla chips or a rice cake made from brown rice.
- Add whole grains like wild or brown rice or whole grain barley to soups, stews or casseroles.
- Choose whole grain pasta, pancakes or waffles
- Try a hot or cold whole grain side dish, like pilaf or stuffing made with brown or wild rice, kasha, bulgur or whole grain barley.

Visit the Charlotte County Health Department at www.CharlotteCHD.com for links to other resources on using whole grains and more fun ideas on healthy eating. You can link through WIC & Nutrition.

This good nutrition series is brought to you by the Charlotte County Health Department, WIC and Nutrition Department. Our vision is to have our community enjoy nutritious food, by helping you to make good nutrition fun. For more information, questions or comments call Sandy Brandt RD, LD at 941-833-2554.