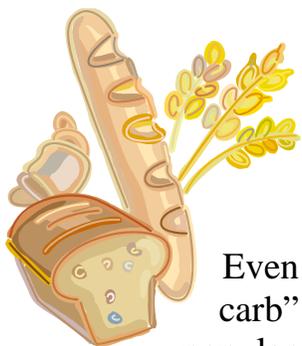


Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

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Hooray for Whole Grains!

By Mindy Bell, BS

Even though the “low carb” food fad has been popular in recent years, it is still important to eat carbohydrate-containing foods each day, especially whole grain foods. Whole grains promote health by providing us with important vitamins and minerals, as well as fiber. They also contain phytochemicals, or plant substances that may help protect our bodies from chronic diseases. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend making half our daily grain choices as whole grain foods to help maintain good health. Whole grains are in the ingredient list for a variety of products, from bread and pastas to some cookies and crackers.

Trying to buy whole grain foods can be confusing and frustrating. However, knowing what whole grains are and what to look for at the store and on food labels can make adding more whole grains to an overall healthful eating plan very easy.

What does the term “whole grain” tell you about a product? Grains (the

entire seed of the plant that grows in the fields) have three layers, and when all three layers are intact, it is considered a whole grain. The tough outer layer is called the bran, and contains much of the fiber and vitamins in the grain. The middle layer is called the endosperm, the largest layer of the grain that is rich in carbohydrate. The inner layer is called the germ, and it contains protein, vitamins, antioxidants, and some fat.

The refining process often strips grains of their bran and germ, leaving mostly carbohydrate from the endosperm, yet little nutrition. While refined grains are often enriched with certain nutrients like folate and iron that were lost during processing, much of the fiber and other healthful substances called phytochemicals are lost. That’s why it is important to make at least half of your daily grain choices whole. For most people, including older adults, this means eating at least three 1-ounce servings per day.



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A single serving of grains is typically one slice of whole wheat bread, ½ cup cooked brown rice or whole wheat pasta, or 1 cup of whole grain cereal. The mypyramid.gov website provides pictures of typical whole grain servings.



Whole grains can be very easy to find at the grocery store. Checking package labels is key, as color is not always a reliable way to tell if a product is whole grain. Many whole grain food packages have “100% whole grain” on the label, or they may have a whole grain as the first item in the ingredient list. These are good indicators that the product is whole grain.

Keep in mind that labeling is sometimes misleading. Terms and phrases, such as “made with whole grain,” “enriched flour,” “high in fiber,” “wheat flour,” and “multigrain” may not always equal whole grain. It is also important to consider foods as a whole when you buy them. For example, cookies that contain a lot of fat, saturated fat, and

sugar may not be a good choice, even if they are made with whole grains.

Eating whole grains can be both healthy and delicious. Consider these ideas for adding a variety of whole grains to your daily food choices:

1. Enjoy oatmeal or a whole grain cereal with fruit for breakfast.
2. Have popcorn or whole wheat crackers for an afternoon snack.
3. Stuff a whole wheat pita pocket with tuna or veggies, or build a sandwich on whole wheat bread for lunch.
4. Add brown rice or a whole wheat roll to your evening meal.
5. Try a whole grain you may not be familiar with, such as whole wheat couscous or quinoa, for a new flavor experience.
6. Replace half the refined flour with whole grain flour in muffins or other baked items.



For more information, see:

The Whole Grains Council at:

<http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org/ConsumerGuide.html>

2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, chapter 5, at:

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/chapter5.htm>