



Grains of truth about WHOLE-GRAIN PRODUCTS & ENRICHED PRODUCTS

Definitions: Whole Grains

Whole grain products are made with the whole kernel of grain. It consists of three components: bran, endosperm and germ. The bran (outer layer) contains the largest amount of fiber, the endosperm (middle layer) contains mostly protein and carbohydrates along with small amounts of B vitamins, and the germ (inner part) is a rich source of trace minerals, unsaturated fats, B vitamins, antioxidants and phytochemicals.

In 1999, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a health claim for whole grain products, for use on product labels of foods that contain 51 percent or more whole grains. The claim was approved by FDA because over 50 scientific studies have shown the benefits of whole grains in the diet and their relationship with the reduction of risk of certain diseases. The claim reads as follows: *“Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods, and low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers.”*

While research continues to show the importance of including whole grain foods in the diet, there is no consensus on the recommended number of servings. However, most authorities recommend at least three. Continual research increases our knowledge about what nutrients, in what amounts, are needed to maintain and prevent disease for a healthy body.

- ◆ **FACT:** The number one cause of death or disability of both men and women in the United States is heart disease. A number of studies support the connection between consumption of whole grain foods and a reduced risk of CHD (coronary heart disease) and its risk factors.¹

There are several feasible theories as to how whole grains may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, however, the specific beneficial mechanism is still unclear. It is likely that whole grain components work together to achieve improved health. ***The sum is greater than its parts.***

- ◆ **FACT:** Cancer claims an estimated 545,000 lives each year, second only to heart disease as an American killer. Dietary factors, such as fiber, vitamin B6 and phytoestrogen intake and lifestyle factors such as exercise, smoking and alcohol use, do not explain the apparent protective effect of whole grains against cancer. It is suggesting that once again it is all of the whole grain components that are effective.^{2,3,4}

Whole grains are a rich source of a wide range of phytochemicals with anti-carcinogenic properties. Some of these phytochemicals may block DNA damage and suppress cancer-cell growth. Many of the phytochemicals concentrated in grains have shown promising results against cancer in lab and animal studies. (General Mills, 1999. Eat Whole Grain for a Healthier You.)

Other components of whole grains may bind carcinogens and thereby limit their absorption or limit their exposure time in the stomach. Components such as selenium, dietary fiber and vitamin E are also believed to be cancer inhibitors by preventing the formation of carcinogens.

- ◆ **FACT:** Whole grains may help protect against diabetes, which is the nation's fifth leading cause of death by disease in the United States. Several studies have shown that cereal fiber (wheat, oats, barley, corn, millet, sorghum, rye and rice) intake is associated with a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. The intake of fiber from whole grain cereals has also been found to be inversely related to type 2 diabetes. In a long-term study of almost 90,000 women and in a similar study of 45,000 men, researchers recently found that those with higher intakes of cereal fiber had about a 21% to 36% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, compared to those with the lowest intakes.^{5,6}

Definitions: Enriched Grains

Enriched white flour is the finely ground endosperm of the kernel. The assumption that everything good has been “stripped” away is a fallacy. Some of what has been milled out has been replaced through enrichment. Slice for slice, enriched white bread, as well as enriched grain products, are a good source of iron and four B vitamins thiamine, niacin, riboflavin and folic acid, as well as complex carbohydrates.

- ◆ **FACT:** Refined grains have been enriched since 1941 with iron and the B vitamins riboflavin, niacin and thiamine. With this enrichment, pellegra and beriberi have been eradicated from the United States.
- ◆ **FACT:** In 1998, the 4th B vitamin, folic acid, was added to the enrichment formula. As of 2002, a study showed that neural tube defects have decreased by 23 percent following the folic acid fortification in the U.S. grain food supply.⁷ In Nova Scotia, NTD has decreased by 54 percent.⁸
- ◆ **FACT:** Enriched grain products have over twice the amount of folic acid as whole wheat. A slice of enriched white bread has 37 mcg versus whole-wheat at 17.5 mcg.
- ◆ **FACT:** Recent studies demonstrated folic acid's value to help prevent heart disease, cancer, and birth defects, as well as helping to prevent strokes and Alzheimer's. However, more research should be done.⁹
- ◆ **FACT:** Folic acid also helps lower blood levels of an amino acid called homocysteine, which has been linked with an increased risk for heart disease.¹⁰
- ◆ **FACT:** Studies from Tufts and Boston Universities have linked high homocysteine levels with increased risk for Alzheimer's disease.¹¹
- ◆ **FACT:** A 1999 study found that 77 percent of low-income women could consume adequate amounts of folic acid through enriched grain products. The cost of supplements are can be expensive, and are often not taken by low-income women.¹²

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