Think Outside the Bread Slice: Updated Information on Whole Grains

By Dena McDowell, MS, RD, CD

Read this program ahead of time to familiarize yourself with whole grains.

Materials:
- A sampling of at least 5-6 grain-based food items from your cupboard: oatmeal, popcorn, rice, wheat bread, pasta, or granola. (These can be whole grains or not. It doesn’t matter as long as you know which are and which aren’t.)
- Paper and writing utensil for each member.
- Copies of handout found on last page of this program.

Preparation:
Bring copies of the handout to the meeting. Arrange the grocery items on the table in front of you. Pass out handout and pens or pencils as members arrive.

Activity:
Do you know which of these foods contain whole grain? Take a moment to jot down the names of each item, and next to it, write whether you think this food contains whole grain. When everyone is done, ask members to put their answers aside until the end of the program.

Begin the program:
According to a recent study by cereal maker General Mills, 61% of us believe we are eating the recommended amount of whole-grain foods each day. However, only 5% of us actually do. Why the gap? The General Mills study showed only 55% of respondents could correctly identify whole grains when reading a food label.

What Makes a Whole Grain Whole?
When you see the phrase “whole grain” on bread, cereal, flour, or other groceries, it tells you the product contains all the essential parts and nutrients of the entire grain seed—the germ, bran, and endosperm.

Have members refer to the handout. Any grain that has been processed must contain the same balance of nutrients found in the original grain seed to be considered a whole grain. Brown rice is a whole grain since all its essential parts and nutrients are intact when sold for food. However, the process for making white rice removes the bran and germ, so it is not a whole grain.

Many refined grain products, such as enriched flour, only contain the endosperm. Without the bran and germ, about 25% of a grain’s protein is lost, along with at least seventeen key nutrients. That’s why breads and pastas made from enriched flour are not as nutritious as their whole-wheat counterparts.

Label Reading Made Easy
Now it’s easier than ever to identify whole-grain foods. The Whole Grains Council has created two stamps that manufacturers can use to help consumers choose foods rich in whole grains. If a product bears the 100% Stamp, then all of a product’s grain ingredients are whole grains, and the product provides a full serving of whole grains (16 grams) per labeled serving.

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If a product bears the Basic Stamp, it contains at least 8 grams—a half serving—of whole grain, but may also contain some refined grain. The stamp will say how many grams of whole grains are in each serving of that food item.

On your next trip to the grocery store, make a goal of picking out three items that have the Whole Grain Stamp or list whole grains as one of the first ingredients.

If there is not a Whole Grain Stamp on the product, look at the ingredient list. A good whole-grain food will include one of these words or phrases near the top:

- Amaranth
- Barley
- Brown Rice
- Buckwheat
- Corn
- Cornmeal
- Millet
- Oats
- Popcorn
- Quinoa

- Rye
- Sorghum
- Stone-ground
- Teff
- Triticale
- Wild Rice
- Whole-wheat Bread
- Whole-wheat Pasta
- Whole-wheat Tortilla

Be leery of products whose ingredients include “high fructose syrup” or “enriched flour” because these foods are not recommended as part of a healthy diet.

**Health Benefits of Whole Grains**

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, eating whole grains as part of a healthy diet may reduce chronic diseases such as heart disease and certain forms of cancer. Eating fiber-rich whole grains may also relieve constipation and provide bowel regularity as well as reduce blood sugar levels in people with diabetes. Whole-grain foods also aid in weight loss because they will make you feel full faster than processed grains and other foods. They are also packed with nutrients, including B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and folate), iron, magnesium, and selenium.

**How to Eat More Whole Grains**

Here are some simple ways you can get more whole grains in your diet:

- Choose brown rice instead of white rice.
- Buy whole-wheat bread instead of processed white, wheat, rye, or multigrain. When reading the label, look for these ingredients: whole wheat, whole oats, whole rye, graham flour, stone-ground, wheat berries, and whole grain corn.
- Choose whole-grain pasta, brown rice, barley, and bulgur as part of casseroles, pasta dishes, soups, and stir-fry recipes.
- When baking, try substituting whole-wheat or oat flour for half the required flour that is called for in the recipe. Using a 50/50 blend of whole-grain and enriched flour will make for baked goods that are slightly denser but still tasty.
- Try topping fruit and yogurt with whole-grain cereal such as toasted oats.
- Snack on whole-grain crackers or baked corn chips with hummus.
- Popcorn also makes the list as a healthy whole-grain snack—without lots of butter and salt, of course! Try seasoning with a salt-free blend or cinnamon for a new taste sensation.

**For Discussion:**

Now that we know more about whole grains, let’s go back and see if we correctly identified them in our sample food products.

Ask the chapter to look over their original answers and give them the correct answers. Ask members to discuss anything that surprised them. Also, ask each person to share a way he or she could start using more whole grains right away.

**For next week**

Visit www.wholegrainscouncil.org for recipes and try something new like buckwheat pancakes or a whole-wheat pasta dish. We will discuss our findings at next week’s meeting. You may even want to print a recipe and share it with our chapter.

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Handout for Think Outside the Bread Slice: Updated Information on Whole Grains

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• When baking, try substituting whole-wheat or oat flour for half the flour that is called for in the recipe. Using a 50/50 blend of whole-grain and enriched flour will make for baked goods that are slightly denser but still tasty.
• Top fruit and yogurt with whole-grain cereal such as toasted oats.
• Snack on whole-grain crackers or baked corn chips with hummus.
• Popcorn is also a healthy whole-grain snack—without lots of butter and salt, of course! Try seasoning with a salt-free blend or cinnamon for a new taste sensation.

“Whole grain” foods include all three parts of the grain seed. Processed grain products (flour, bread, pasta), must also contain the same balance of nutrients found in the original seed to be considered “whole grain.”

Look at the Label

On your next trip to the grocery store, make a goal of picking out three items that have the Whole Grain Stamp.

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- Wheat
- Wild Rice
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- Whole-wheat Pasta
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Other Names for Wheat

- Spelt
- Emmer
- Faro
- Einkorn
- Durum
- Cracked Wheat
- Wheat Berries

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