

How to Choose Whole Grains

What are whole grains?

What is a refined grain? What are some examples of refined grains?

What are enriched grains?

What are some examples of whole grains?

Why are whole grains so important?

Are whole grains more nutritious than enriched grain products?

Is whole wheat flour or bread a whole grain?

What should I look for when choosing a whole grain product?

How can I include more whole grains in my diet?

What are whole grains?

A whole grain includes all three parts of the kernel (or seed) of the grain:

1. The bran is the outer layer of the grain. It provides the most fibre of the three parts and contains B vitamins, minerals and a small amount of protein.
2. The endosperm is the biggest part of the whole grain and contains carbohydrate and protein. It provides a small amount of vitamins and minerals.
3. The germ is the smallest part of the kernel. It provides a large amount of B vitamins, vitamin E and minerals.

Since whole grains include all of these three parts, they're higher in fibre and have more vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients than refined grains.

What is a refined grain? What are some examples of refined grains?

A refined grain has had some or all of the germ and bran removed, leaving mostly just the endosperm. Examples include: white flour, white rice, whole wheat flour and cream of wheat cereal

What are enriched grains?

Enriched grains have had the vitamins and minerals that were lost during storage, transport or processing added back in by the manufacturer. An example of an enriched grain is white flour. In Canada, white flour must be enriched with vitamins and iron, which means that the manufacturer added in those nutrients. However, even enriched white flour is missing many of the other nutrients and fibre that is found in whole grains

What are some examples of whole grains?

Some examples of whole grains include: whole oats, brown and wild rice, barley, buckwheat, quinoa, rye, bulgur, corn and popcorn. [All about Whole Grains](#) will provide you with the details on the different grains and how to cook them

Why are whole grains so important?

Research shows that people who eat more whole grains may have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. Whole grains include all three parts of the kernel and are higher in fibre, vitamins and minerals when compared to refined grains and enriched grains. You will get the greatest health benefit from eating whole grains.

Are whole grains more nutritious than enriched grain products?

Whole grains are considered more nutritious than enriched grain products since they have a higher amount of fibre and [phytochemicals](#).

However, enriched grain products do have some health benefits because they have the nutrients lost

during processing re-added back to them. For example, enriched pasta, bread, cereal and rice have iron and B vitamins added as well as folic acid.

Use the [Nutrition Facts Table](#) to compare your grain products. Use the %DV to see if your product has a little or lot of a nutrient.

Is whole wheat flour or bread a whole grain?

No, whole wheat flour or whole wheat bread cannot be considered a whole grain since part of the wheat kernel is removed. Whole wheat flour has had most of the germ and some of the bran removed.

Products labelled as 100% whole wheat or 60% whole wheat are not whole grain products. For whole wheat flour to be a whole grain, in the ingredients list you should see the words “whole grain whole wheat” or “whole wheat flour with added germ”.

What should I look for when choosing a whole grain product?

Choosing whole grains is easier than you think if you read food labels. Follow these two simple steps:

1. To make sure whole grains are the main ingredient, they should appear first on the ingredient list. Look for words such as:

Whole grain whole wheat flour

Whole rye

Whole oat or oatmeal

Whole corn

Whole barley

Watch out for multigrain products, which may include a variety of different grains but may not include whole grains. Also, some foods that say on the label, “made with whole grain”, may be mostly refined

grain with just a little whole grain.

2. Look for higher fibre whole grains. Foods labelled "whole grain" are not always high in fibre. Check the Nutrition Facts table on package labels to find the amount of fibre per serving and choose the higher fibre products.

A food "source" of fibre has at least 2 grams of fibre per serving.

A "high fibre" food has at least 4 grams of fibre or more per serving.

How can I include more whole grains in my diet?

[Canada's Food Guide](#) suggests you include whole grains at every meal. Here are some ideas:

Have oatmeal or other whole grain cereals for breakfast. Read the ingredients list and look for "whole grain" in the first ingredients.

Choose whole grain breads including rolls, [English muffins](#), bagels, tortillas, naan and pita bread for sandwiches or wraps.

Try whole grain pasta instead of regular pasta - the nutty flavour is delicious!

Use [whole grain couscous](#), bulgur, brown rice or [quinoa](#) in salads. Try [tabouleh](#), a salad made with [bulgur](#).

Add barley, brown rice or whole wheat pasta to soups. Try [Souper Lunch with Rice and Beans](#) or [Khao Tom \(Thai rice soup\)](#).

For [stir-frys](#) or pilaf try brown rice instead of white rice (or mix them half and half).

Enjoy millet, [wild rice](#) or barley as a side dish instead of rice.

See [All about Whole Grains](#) for preparation and cooking tips.

Here are some more recipes to try:

[Yummy Quinoa Lunch](#)

[Vegetable Quinoa Salad](#)

[Mmmuesli Cookies](#)

[Baked Cinnamon Pears with Oat Topping](#)

[Whole Wheat Orange Ginger Scones](#)

How can a dietitian help?

[Dietitians](#) can support you throughout many phases of your life from pregnancy to eating well when you are older. Counselling sessions with a dietitian can also help you to prevent and treat healthy conditions like diabetes and heart disease. Your dietitian can also give you tips on label reading, grocery shopping and meal prep to help increase the amount of whole grains in your diet. [Connect with a dietitian today!](#)

Bottom line

Choose whole grains more often for a nutritional boost! Reading food labels is the best way to spot whole grains.

You may also be interested in:

[How to Choose the Best Sliced Bread](#)

[All About Whole Grains](#)

[Top 5 Reasons to See a Dietitian](#)

This article was written and reviewed by dietitians from Dietitians of Canada. The advice in this article is intended as general information and should not replace advice given by your dietitian or healthcare provider.