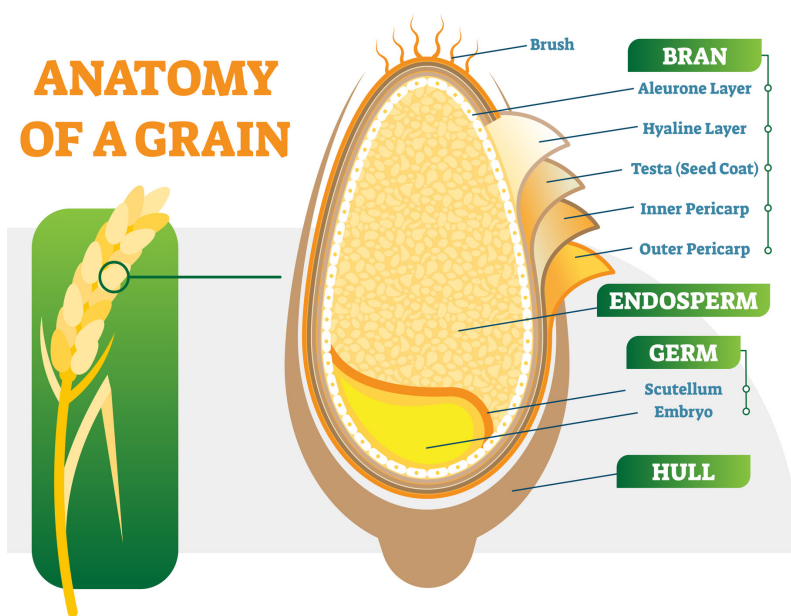


Whole Grains: Breaking Down the Mystery

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choosemyplate.gov). All bread, cereals, pasta, rice, flour and similar grain foods would fall into this group. However, not all grains are considered whole grains. A whole grain is an unprocessed grain. Processing removes the essential components of the grain kernel. A grain kernel is composed of three main parts: the bran, the germ and the endosperm (fig. 1). During production, grains that retain all three of these components are considered “whole.” On the other hand, to give grains a smoother texture and increase their shelf-life, grains are processed, or milled, to remove the bran and the germ, making refined grain. Many of the nutrients contained in the grain kernel are in the bran and the germ. During the refining process, the grain loses vitamins such as folate and riboflavin, fiber, and certain minerals. Consumers find refined grains in most white bread, white rice, and pasta.

Whole grains are an important component to a healthy diet, but are often overlooked or avoided. On average, Americans eat far too many processed grains that are not healthy. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends eating between 3-8 ounces (1/3 to one cup) of grains per day, depending upon your age and gender. In addition, the recommendation is that at least half of these grains should be whole grains. Identifying whole grains and foods made with whole grains would be simple, but the truth is that it can get a little complex. We are going to break down the mystery of what is, or is not, a healthy choice in whole grains.

What is the difference between whole grains and refined grains?

A grain is any food product made from “wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or another cereal grain” (www.

What about multi-grain, enriched, and fortified foods?

A food labeled “made with whole grain” does not necessarily mean that it is a whole grain. If you find a food that is labeled “whole wheat,” you can be confident that the majority of that food is whole grain. However, if a food is labeled “multi-grain,” this does not guarantee that it is whole grain. Refined grains can be in multi-grain foods. In addition, foods labeled “enriched” include refined grains that have had some of their vitamins and minerals added back after the refining process. The problem is that the fiber is not added back in the enriching process. Finally, “fortified grain products” have vitamins and minerals added to them that were not present in the grain. Certain cereals are fortified grain products.

What should we look for when shopping for whole-grain foods?

When buying whole-grain foods, look for words such as:

- Whole grain
- Whole wheat
- Brown rice
- Whole (the type of grain)
- Any type of oat or oatmeal

Also, get in the habit of looking at the ingredients of foods. They are listed in order of their percentage within the product. The ingredients that are present in higher amounts are listed first. If you see whole wheat, or whole grain, listed in the beginning, it is a safer bet that the food is predominately whole grain.



Choose “Whole” for health!

While many parents choose refined grains because of the smoother texture, and lower price, many of the nutrients and taste are lost. An eating plan with more fiber, vitamins and minerals is healthier and decreases the risk for diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.

Good for you, if whole-grain foods are a regular item in your recipes and meal planning! Keep it up! Start simple if whole grains are something new for you and your family. Begin by choosing whole-grain cereals instead of sugary foods. You can also select whole-wheat toast over white, refined bread. Another tip might be to choose foods made with white whole wheat, which is a different type of whole grain but looks and tastes similar to refined grains. Introduce whole grains into your eating plan slowly until you meet the USDA guidelines mentioned above.

Whole grains are a better choice than refined grains in every way. Your future self will thank you for it!

Resources:

www.choosemyplate.gov
www.wholegrainscouncil.org