

# “The Whole Truth About Whole Grains” presented by Dr. John Ferguson

We hear a lot about the health benefits of whole grains these days. And food manufacturers know we’re listening by liberally and questionably using the term “whole grain” to describe their products to ride the trend bandwagon. Make sure you’re armed with the truth about whole grains during your next trip to the grocery store.

Whole grains contain the whole kernel. However, when grains are refined or processed, two essential kernel components – the bran (outer shell) and germ (seed) – are removed, which provide supply most of the grain’s health-boosting nutrients. They include niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, magnesium, phosphorus, iron and zinc and are an excellent source of fiber (and just because something says fiber or says organic does not mean it’s 100% whole grain). Whole grains also play a key role in preventing obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some types of cancer (read below).

## Ingredients Uncovered!

At a typical supermarket, about 10% of grain-based products are genuinely whole grain. Thus, a challenge when looking for your healthiest option, not to mention the fact that most products appear to be whole grain, but only contain a miniscule amount – or none at all.

First, examine the front of the package. If the words “wheat”, “whole grain” or “contains whole grains” appear, most likely only a fraction of the products have whole grains. Instead, look for “100% whole grain” or “complete whole wheat.” Don’t be fooled by “multi-grain” options, which often contain mostly refined grains.

## Ingredient checklist

The **first ingredient** and *only* flour listed **should contain** the word “**whole**”, such as “whole wheat”, “stone ground whole grain”, “whole rye”, “whole-grain pumpernickel” or “whole oats.”

Next, the second ingredient should *not* be a form of refined grain, even if the primary ingredient is a whole grain. Such refined grains include “wheat flour” or “enriched flour”, meaning it contains a large mix of refined flour. Don’t be fooled by healthy-sounding ingredients such as “unbleached wheat flour”, “durum wheat”, “cracked wheat” or “bran”.

Again, whole grain should be the first ingredient and only flour listed!

## Enriched Flour

Enriched flour is far from whole, or its natural state. It undergoes a refining process that cleaves out essential nutrients and then “enriched” when manufacturers add back a few of these nutrients. Along those lines, “unbleached” is not equal to whole grain unless clearly labeled “whole”. Otherwise, it’s been refined and stripped of health-boosting components.

## Whole Grain Health Benefits

Obstruct Obesity Consuming breakfast cereals with whole grains consistently was shown to pack on fewer pounds in participants during an eight-year study than in those who ate them less often (1). This benefit is because these cereals do not raise blood sugar as high and as quick as processed foods like bread or pasta that contain enriched white flour that triggers an overproduction of insulin which ushers weight gain.

Deter Diabetes Consuming a “Western” diet of refined grains, red and processed meats, sweets and fried foods was shown to increase the likelihood of developing diabetes during a 14 year study as opposed to a “prudent” diet. This latter diet consisted of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, fish and poultry (2).

*Inhibit Inflammation* A diet rich in whole grains significantly reduced two key markers of inflammation (C-reactive protein and tumor necrosis factor alpha receptor 2) in a study of 902 individuals with diabetes, a “disease” linked with chronic inflammation (3).

*Halt Heart Disease* Participants who consumed the highest amount of whole grains had the lowest levels of total cholesterol and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol among 938 subjects in one study (4). Another 14 year study of 42,850 subjects reported that risks were significantly elevated among individuals who refrained from, or rarely ate, whole grains (5).

### **How to Get More Whole Grains**

For breakfast, swap the white breads and bagels for whole-grain cereals or whole-grain toast. For lunch and dinner, opt for whole-wheat pasta or brown rice. For snacks, consider whole-grain crackers/bread with hummus or tapenade rather than refined grains choices. And, when baking, always use whole-wheat flour.

### **How Much Whole Grain Should I Eat?**

Two to three ounces of 100% whole-grain foods per day is sufficient. In other words, the amount of whole grains that can fit in the palm of your hands is what we should limit ourselves to daily. Why? Simple...our intestines are not designed to process and digest more than that amount. When we encounter too many grains, our body cannot break down all the proteins contained in them and we have created an inflammatory state in our gut – not a good thing; not to mention the fact that most Americans consume 2-3 times the amount of grain that we should through breads, cereals, pasta, rice, bagels and rolls each day. Furthermore, this high inflammatory-promoting consumption of wheat and grains destroys the healthy bacteria (“probiotics”) in our intestines that is needed for immune function and making vitamins as well as extracting nutrients from our foods. The type of probiotic bacteria we require was established thousands of years before humans developed agriculture or consumed wheat or grains. Thus, do not consume more than 3 ounces of grains (which should be only whole grains) daily to maximize the benefits of this food.

1. Obes Res 2005; 13:1952-60
2. Arch Intern Med 2004; 164:2235-40
3. Diabetes Care 2006; 29:207-11
4. Am J Clin Nutr 2006; 83:27
5. Am J Clin Nutr 2004; 80:1492-9

If you are seeking nutritional advice it is wise to consult a wellness nutrition expert like Dr. John who is knowledgeable in what the innate genetic requirements are for the health of all the body’s cells.

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