

September: National Whole Grains Month

Did you know that people who eat whole grains as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases? Grains provide many nutrients vital for health and it is recommended that at least half of all the grains eaten be whole grains. September is whole grains month, and on average most Americans eat enough grains, but few are whole grains. Check out the following tips to help increase your intake of whole grains.

What are grains? Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain is a grain product. Examples include bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas and grits. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel—the bran, germ, and endosperm. Examples include whole-wheat flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), oatmeal, whole cornmeal and brown rice.

What are the health benefits? Consuming whole grains as part of a healthy diet may reduce the risk of heart disease, help with weight management and reduce constipation. Grains are important sources of many nutrients, including dietary fiber, several B vitamins and minerals.

Whole grains at meals. Use whole-grain breads for sandwiches, try brown rice stuffing in baked green peppers or tomatoes, or put whole-wheat macaroni in macaroni and cheese. Try rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole-grain cereal as breading for baked chicken, fish or veal cutlets.

Whole grains as snacks. Snack on ready-to-eat, whole-grain cereals. Add whole-grain flour or oatmeal to baked treats. Try 100% whole-grain snack crackers. Popcorn, a whole grain, can be a healthy snack if made with little or no added salt and butter.

What to look for on food labels. Choose foods that list a whole grain (such as brown rice, oatmeal, bulgur, wild rice, whole-grain corn, whole oats, whole rye or whole wheat) first on the ingredient list. Multi-grain, stone-ground, seven-grain or bran are usually not whole-grain foods. Also, choose products with a higher percent daily value (%DV) for fiber.

To broaden your food horizons with whole grains, try substituting a whole grain product for a refined one and using the Nutrition Facts Label to help you choose more whole grains at the grocery store.

