

Whole Grains, Whole Health

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Much talk has been circulating about the benefits of eating whole grains – and the consequent cutting back of refined products, such as white rice, pasta, and flour. Whole grains undoubtedly provide you the benefit of a higher nutritional value – that which includes fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

Nowadays, getting these whole grains into your diet is pretty easy. Whole grains sit abundantly on shelves in almost every grocery store, right next to the old standard white rice, breads, and pastas. Grains such as brown rice, Quinoa, couscous, and others are increasingly becoming very popular, and are the defining element of a superlative diet.

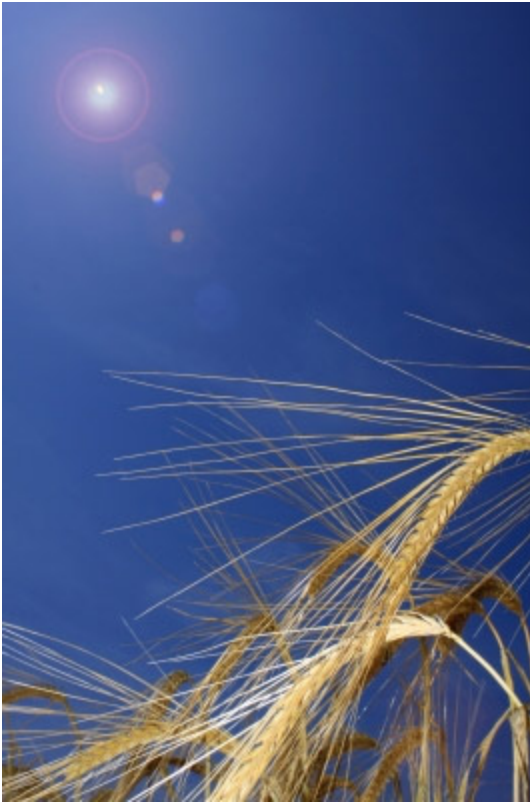
While sauntering through your local grocery store, shopping list in tow, browse your favorite aisles and pick out some whole grain products that you think you'd like to try. You might be surprised at how full of flavor most of these grains are.

Substitute. Substitute whole grains for other kinds of carbohydrates that you would normally use. For example, if you generally make mashed potatoes to go with your usual steak or meatloaf, try cooking up some polenta instead. For a creamy polenta, you can add water, milk, or stock and then simmer it on the stovetop until it reaches the desired consistency. Or, to make it easier on yourself, buy polenta that has already been cooked, available in a tube. Simply slice it up and either fry it in a little olive oil (about 5 minutes per side), or you can bake it in the oven. Top it with cheese, olives, or sliced tomatoes, or drizzle it with olive oil or tomato sauce. It's a pretty versatile little grain!

Eat, eat, eat! Sample the many variations of grains that are available; peruse recipes for potentially scrumptious possibilities; taste-test different combinations of flavors. Whole grains are much tastier than refined grains, and so bring a lot more flavor to your table. Try adding nuts, onions, and garlic to brown rice, or cook quinoa with raisins, parsley, and cumin. Have fun mixing it up.

Experiment. Try different textures and tastes when first trying whole grains. Remember that the taste of whole grains can be nuttier and earthier, so the ingredients you choose to

add to your dishes should compliment this taste. Be creative. Be adventurous. Be willing to make mistakes – everyone does. Above all, have a good time!



Keep in mind...

Grains as complete proteins. Grains such as quinoa are a complete protein, which means that they can be a substitute for meats, rice and beans, or nuts. Quinoa is a wonderful source of protein if you are vegetarian, or vegan. And on top of all that, it also has a nice, soft texture, and a sweet, nutty flavor.

Adjust your cooking time. Many whole grains have a much heavier, denser texture than their more refined cousins, so give yourself extra time when you're cooking brown rice or whole wheat pasta. Couscous and quinoa, however, actually take very little time to cook. Since much of cooking is all about timing, try to pay attention to these differences. (Because nobody wants a pot of burned couscous, now, do they)?

Some sure-fire winners:

- Whole wheat flour, rather than refined, white flour
- Brown rice, as opposed to white
- Whole wheat pasta, not white pasta
- Quinoa, a whole grain that is actually not a cereal, but a fruit from the plant *Chenopodium*
- Whole wheat couscous
- Polenta, a corn-based grain (very similar to grits)