

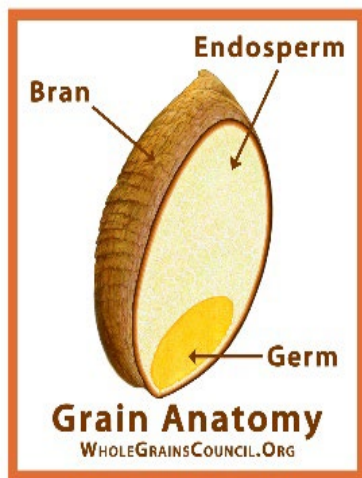
Whole Grains- Topic of the Month

MARCH 1, 2023

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) added whole grains to the WIC food package in 2009 to encourage consumption of whole grains among WIC participants. The addition of whole grains in the daily diet provides many health benefits, including lowering the risk of stroke, diabetes, heart disease, assisting in controlling cholesterol levels, weight, and blood pressure, and reducing inflammation in the body.

Choosing whole grains and other nutrient-dense foods that are prepared with minimal added sugars, refined starches, or sodium provides our bodies with an abundant source of energy, vitamins, and minerals. So, what is a whole grain? Read on to find out!

What is a “Whole Grain”?



A grain seed or “kernel” starts its life whole. Made up of three parts, the bran, germ, and endosperm, the kernel is surrounded by an inedible husk to protect the inside from weather, pests, and disease while it grows.

A whole grain is defined as “whole” when it contains the entire grain kernel, and it has the same proportions of each that it did when growing in a field.

Some examples of whole grains include barley, quinoa, popcorn, whole wheat bread or pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-grain cereal.

Did you know...Some products are made from a mixture of whole and refined grains. To be called “whole grain”, a product must contain 100% whole grains.

Refined grains are milled to remove the bran and germ. This is done to improve texture and shelf life, but it also removes some of the key nutrients. Many refined grains are then enriched, adding back in vitamins and minerals that had been lost. Some examples of refined grains include white bread, refined-grain cereal, corn grits, cream of wheat, white pasta, and white rice.

Nutritional Benefits

As a part of a healthy dietary intake, whole grains are a great source of many nutrients. Whole grains help us feel fuller longer, lower cholesterol levels, reduce risk of heart disease, help to build strong bones, and keep our immune system healthy.

Each distinct part of the whole grain offers benefits:

- **Bran-** Fiber, B vitamins, iron, zinc, magnesium, and antioxidants
- **Germ-** B vitamins, vitamin E, protein, minerals, and healthy fats
- **Endosperm-** Starchy carbohydrates, protein, and some B vitamins and minerals

Did you know... Whole wheat tortillas, pasta, and bread and brown rice are also a source of folic acid. When encouraging whole grain foods, suggest participants choose some products that have been fortified with folic acid.

Recommended Intake

Most people eat foods that contain grains, but are they getting enough whole grains? The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020- 2025](#) recommend that at least **half (50%) of one's total grain intake each day should come from whole grains and the remainder from enriched grains.**

Some of the common grains consumed each day are breads, buns, tortillas, rice, cereal, and pasta. See the tips below for ways to make the shift to increase one's daily consumption of whole grains.

Tips for meeting the recommendations:

- Choose 100% Whole Grain foods; the whole grain should be the first food listed on the ingredient list.
- For foods with multiple grains listed; whole grains should be near the beginning (or right after water).
- Shift from “white” to whole wheat breads, buns, pastas, and tortillas.
- Choose brown rice over white rice.
- Try ready to eat whole grain cereals or oats for easy breakfast options.
- Use whole grain products in any of your family's favorite dishes such as spaghetti, quesadillas, stir fry, and soups or stews.
- Reduce intake of processed grain snacks such as chips, cakes, cookies, or bars.

Exploring new foods together as a family is a great way to lead by example while creating healthy habits that will benefit each member. Talk about the choices you are making and encourage children to learn about the benefits as well. [My Plate- Kids](#) has great activities that can help get kids be involved in eating more whole grains.

WIC Utilization of Whole Grains

The utilization of whole grain food items has been around 43-45% for MN WIC in the last 4 months. Check the utilization of whole grain food items for your local agency. Think about ways you can assist participants with using whole grain foods.

- Search the [Minnesota WIC Benefit Utilization Summary](#) for state and local agency rates.

WIC Allowed Whole Grain Products

The whole grain choices currently allowed in the WIC food package include:

- 100% Whole Wheat Bread
- Brown Rice
- Plain Rolled Oats
- Whole Wheat or Corn Tortillas
- 100% Whole Wheat Pasta

Did you know... All whole wheat is whole grain, but not all whole grain products are whole wheat. Whole wheat should be the first ingredient listed on any whole grain food product to be WIC allowed.

Cooking Tips

Some participants may be leery when it comes to trying whole grain bread, pasta, or brown rice. It may be helpful to offer some tips and suggested uses to encourage them. Look in the [WIC Recipes: Breads & Grains](#) for ideas to share. The [Quick Tips for CPAs- Whole Grains](#) is another place to find helpful hints.

Helpful Tips:

- Brown Rice
 - Cook on stove top or try using a rice cooker.
 - Start with mixing brown rice and white rice, gradually increasing the brown rice over time.
 - Use rice in soup, stews, casseroles, or salads.
- Whole Wheat Bread or Tortillas
 - Store the product with an airtight container in a cool, dry area.
 - Make a grilled cheese or quesadilla (try one side whole wheat and one side white).
 - Make tortilla pizza faces or open face bread sandwich (use fruits and vegetables to decorate the face).
- Whole Wheat Pasta
 - Cook whole wheat pasta a bit longer and test for softness.
 - Try mixing the whole wheat and white pasta a few times when first introducing.
 - Make soup or use sauce to add flavor and color to the dish.

With small children, it can be helpful to allow the children in the home to help with shopping and meal preparation! Getting the family involved in choosing the product, recipe, and talking about the food will go a long way in acceptance.

Staff Exercise

Choose one (or more) recipes made with a WIC whole grain product. Try something new! Make the recipe at home for yourself or with your family, and if able, bring in to share with co-workers. Use the discussion points below to decide how to rate the recipe.

Discussion Points:

- Discuss the price and availability of the ingredients in the store.
 - Is it affordable?
 - Were ingredients hard to find?
- Discuss the level of difficulty in making the recipe.
 - Is it manageable for families with young children?
 - Did it take a long time to make?
- Discuss what you liked or didn't like about the products/recipe.
- Think if you would make any substitutions.
- Think what other WIC foods are included in the recipe that you can share with participants.

Choose one (or more) of the staff favorite recipe(s). **Commit to sharing the chosen recipe(s) with at least 1 WIC participant each day for up to 1 week.**

Additional Staff Resources

WIC [Shopping Guides](#)

[Help Participants Use Benefits](#)

Resources Used

[What's a Whole Grain? A Refined Grain?](#) (Oldways Whole Grains Council)

[Whole Grains](#) (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health)

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#)

[Grains](#) (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) MyPlate)

Reference - Complete Listing of Hyperlinks:

WHOLE GRAINS- TOPIC OF THE MONTH

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020- 2025](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)

(https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)

[My Plate- Kids](https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/kids) (<https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/kids>)

[Minnesota WIC Benefit Utilization Summary - MN Dept. of Health](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/reports/benefits.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/reports/benefits.html>)

[WIC Recipes](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/index.html>)

[Breads & Grains](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/breads.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/breads.html>)

[Quick Tips for CPAs- Whole Grains](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/nutrition/fpchange/tips/grains.pdf)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/nutrition/fpchange/tips/grains.pdf>)

[WIC Shopping Help](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html#shopguide1)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html#shopguide1>)

[Help Participants Use Benefits](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/benefithelp.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/benefithelp.html>)

[What's a Whole Grain? A Refined Grain?](https://wholegrainscouncil.org/whole-grains-101/whats-whole-grain-refined-grain) (<https://wholegrainscouncil.org/whole-grains-101/whats-whole-grain-refined-grain>)

[Whole Grains](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/whole-grains/) (<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/whole-grains/>)

[Grains](https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/grains) (<https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/grains>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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