



## What foods are in the Grains Group?

Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits are examples of grain products.



Grains are divided into 2 subgroups, Whole Grains and Refined Grains. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel — the bran, germ, and endosperm. Examples of whole grains include whole-wheat flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), oatmeal, whole cornmeal, and brown rice. Refined grains have been milled, a process that removes the bran and germ. This is done to give grains a finer texture and improve their shelf life, but it also removes dietary fiber, iron, and many B vitamins. *Some examples of refined grain products* are white flour, de-germed cornmeal, white bread, and white rice.

Most refined grains are enriched. This means certain B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid) and iron are added back after processing. Fiber is not added back to enriched grains. Check the ingredient list on refined grain products to make sure that the word "enriched" is included in the grain name. Some food products are made from mixtures of whole grains and refined grains.

## How many grain foods are needed daily?

The amount of grains you need to eat depends on your age, sex, and level of physical activity. Recommended daily amounts are listed in this table below. Most Americans consume enough grains, but few are whole grains. **At least half of all the grains eaten should be whole grains.**

Note: Click on the top row to expand the table. If you are on a mobile device, you may need to turn your phone to see the full table.

Swipe to see the full table. false

**DAILY GRAIN TABLE**



\*These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, beyond normal daily activities. Those who are more physically active may be able to consume more while staying within calorie needs.

## What counts as an ounce-equivalent of grains?

In general, 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, cooked pasta, or cooked cereal can be considered as 1 ounce-equivalent from the Grains Group. The table below lists specific amounts that count as 1 ounce-equivalent of grains towards your daily recommended intake. In some cases the number of ounce-equivalents for common portions are also shown.

Note: Click on the top row to expand the table. If you are on a mobile device, you may need to turn your phone to see the full table.

Swipe to see the full table. false

## OUNCE-EQUIVALENT OF GRAINS TABLE



\*WG = whole grains, RG = refined grains. This is shown when products are available both in whole grain and refined grain forms.

Last Updated: Nov 3, 2017



## Why is it important to eat grains, especially whole grains?

Eating grains, especially whole grains, provides health benefits. People who eat whole grains as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases. Grains provide many nutrients that are vital for the health and maintenance of our bodies.

### Nutrients

- Grains are important sources of many nutrients, including **dietary fiber**, several B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folate), and minerals (**iron**, **magnesium**, and selenium).
- Dietary fiber from whole grains or other foods, may help reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Fiber is important for proper bowel function. It helps reduce constipation and diverticulosis. Fiber-containing foods such as whole grains help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories.
- The B vitamins thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin play a key role in metabolism – they help the body release energy from protein, fat, and carbohydrates. B vitamins are also essential for a healthy nervous system. Many refined grains are enriched with these B vitamins.
- Folate (folic acid), another B vitamin, helps the body form red blood cells. Women of childbearing age who may become pregnant should consume adequate folate from foods, and in addition 400 mcg of synthetic folic acid from fortified foods or supplements. This reduces the risk of neural tube defects, spina bifida, and anencephaly during fetal development.
- Iron is used to carry oxygen in the blood. Many teenage girls and women in their childbearing years have iron-deficiency anemia. They should eat foods high in heme-iron (meats) or eat other iron containing foods along with foods rich in vitamin C, which can improve absorption of non-heme iron. Whole and enriched refined grain products are major sources of non-heme iron in American diets.
- Whole grains are sources of magnesium and selenium. Magnesium is a mineral used in building bones and releasing energy from muscles. Selenium protects cells from oxidation. It is also important for a healthy immune system.



### Health benefits

- Consuming whole grains as part of a healthy diet may reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Consuming foods containing fiber, such as whole grains, as part of a healthy diet, may reduce constipation.
- Eating whole grains may help with weight management.
- Eating grain products fortified with folate before and during pregnancy helps prevent neural tube defects during fetal development.

Last Updated: Jun 12, 2015



## TIPS: Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains

### Tip Sheets:

- [10 Tips: Choosing Whole-Grain Foods](#)
- [10 Tips: Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains](#)



### At meals:

- To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined product – such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice. It’s important to *substitute* the whole-grain product for the refined one, rather than *adding* the whole-grain product.
- For a change, try brown rice or whole-wheat pasta. Try brown rice stuffing in baked green peppers or tomatoes and whole-wheat macaroni in macaroni and cheese.
- Use whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soup or stews and bulgur wheat in a casserole or stir-fry.
- Create a whole grain pilaf with a mixture of barley, wild rice, brown rice, broth and spices. For a special touch, stir in toasted nuts or chopped dried fruit.
- Experiment by substituting whole wheat or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancake, waffle, muffin or other flour-based recipes. They may need a bit more leavening.
- Use whole-grain bread or cracker crumbs in meatloaf.
- Try rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole grain cereal as breading for baked chicken, fish, veal cutlets, or eggplant parmesan.
- Try an unsweetened, whole grain ready-to-eat cereal as croutons in salad or in place of crackers with soup.
- Freeze leftover cooked brown rice, bulgur, or barley. Heat and serve it later as a quick side dish.

### As snacks:

- Snack on ready-to-eat, whole grain cereals such as toasted oat cereal.
- Add whole-grain flour or oatmeal when making cookies or other 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 the food label:

- Choose foods that name one of the following whole-grain ingredients first on the label's ingredient list:

Whole grain ingredients	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brown rice</li> <li>• buckwheat</li> <li>• bulgur</li> <li>• millet</li> <li>• oatmeal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whole-grain barley</li> <li>• whole-grain corn</li> <li>• whole-grain sorghum</li> <li>• whole-grain triticale</li> <li>• whole oats</li> </ul>

- popcorn
- quinoa
- rolled oats

- whole rye
- whole wheat
- wild rice

- Foods labeled with the words "multi-grain," "stone-ground," "100% wheat," "cracked wheat," "seven-grain," or "bran" are usually not whole-grain products.
- Color is not an indication of a whole grain. Bread can be brown because of molasses or other added ingredients. Read the ingredient list to see if it is a whole grain.
- Use the [Nutrition Facts label](#) and choose whole grain products with a higher % Daily Value (% DV) for fiber. Many, but not all, whole grain products are good or excellent sources of fiber.
- Read the food label's ingredient list. Look for terms that indicate added sugars (such as sucrose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, malt syrup, maple syrup, molasses, or raw sugar) that add extra calories. Choose foods with fewer added sugars.
- Most sodium in the food supply comes from packaged foods. Similar packaged foods can vary widely in sodium content, including breads. Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose foods with a lower % DV for sodium. Foods with less than 140 mg sodium per serving can be labeled as low sodium foods. Claims such as "low in sodium" or "very low in sodium" on the front of the food label can help you identify foods that contain less salt (or sodium).

## Whole grain tips for children

- Set a good example for children by eating whole grains with meals or as snacks.
- Let children select and help prepare a whole grain side dish.
- Teach older children to read the ingredient list on cereals or snack food packages and choose those with whole grains at the top of the list.

Last Updated: Jul 25, 2017