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Agriculture & Natural Resources



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Whole Grains or Counterfeits?

Whole grains play an important role in maintaining health and preventing disease—and food manufacturers are playing it to the max. The question is: how do you know if a product is whole grain or a counterfeit? You may think that you can tell simply by looking. Although this may occasionally be the case, oftentimes products look very similar. Consider bread for instance, just because the color of the bread is brown, and the label reads “wheat bread” it does not necessarily mean that this bread is anything more than white bread with brown coloring added. Pick up the loaf of bread. Notice that the bread is light. Now, pick up a loaf of bread that says “whole wheat” or “whole grain” on the label. Do you notice any difference? You may also notice that the label says “whole.” This word is very important, without it, it’s simply refined, white bread. If you have any doubt what the product is really made of, just turn it over and read the label. The ingredients are listed in order of largest quantity. Thus, the first ingredient listed should be a whole grain such as “whole wheat flour.” This rule of thumb also applies to cereals. The front of the box may say “whole grain” but look at the list of ingredients and see what is listed first. If it says oats, whole wheat, or whole grain, you have made a wise (and healthy) choice.

At this point, you may be wondering, what’s the big deal about whole grains? In a nut shell, whole grains have the fiber, vitamins, and minerals that refined grains are lacking. Identifying refined grains may be tricky, so here’s a tip: the terms unbleached, enriched, or wheat (without the word *whole*) indicate a refined grain. A whole grain (like a fruit or vegetable) provides a package of nutrients that are good for us and may be beneficial in delaying onset or preventing certain diseases.

Whole grains are great to eat and great for your health! So what can whole grains do for you?

- New research is showing that women who consume more whole grains have a lower risk of developing diabetes
- Diets high in whole grains may reduce the risk of heart disease, and may lower cholesterol
- Whole grains provide fiber which aids in bowel regularity
- Are you looking to lose weight? Whole grains can help! When you eat whole grains, the fiber it contains takes longer to digest and keeps you fuller longer

Some simple ways to get some extra whole grain in your diet are:

- Purchase whole wheat bread rather than wheat bread or white bread
- Purchase whole wheat pasta instead of enriched pasta
- Start eating brown rice rather than white rice
- Choose oatmeal or other whole grain cereal for breakfast (don’t forget to check the list of ingredients to make sure it’s a whole grain)

The next time you’re at the store, make sure you flip over the package and insure you’re really getting those important and healthy whole grains. The verdict is in: whole grains are great! Here’s to whole grains and healthy eating!

Source: <http://www.cspinet.org/nah/wwheat.html> accessed on April 30, 2006.