

5 Smart Reasons to Get into a Whole Grain Habit

Whole grains come with a whole lot of delicious nutrition in every kernel. That's the benefit of *whole* grains, you get the nutrient richness of bran (outside layer), endosperm (inside), and germ (center) in wheat, rye, oats, and other grains. Here are five important reasons to make *at least half your grains whole*.

1. FIBER

One of the most important nutrients found in whole grains is fiber, which keeps your entire intestinal tract running smoothly. However, fiber benefits go far beyond bowel function. Fiber can help reduce blood cholesterol, normalize blood sugar levels, and aid in weight management, since high fiber meals and snacks help increase satisfaction.

2. STANOLS, STEROLS, and other PHYTONUTRIENTS

The good news is that whole grains naturally offer a whole lot more nutrition than plain fiber or fiber supplements. Whole grains contain literally hundreds of beneficial plant compounds (phytonutrients). Stanols and sterols are one example. They help lower cholesterol levels by keeping it from being absorbed into the blood stream.

3. ANTI-OXIDANTS

These are substances in food that help protect your cells from aging. Like 'rust-proofing' for your car, antioxidants protect your body from negative changes when it is exposed to oxygen. Antioxidants with known benefits for human health include vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, and several other compounds found in whole grains.

4. CARBOHYDRATES

These key nutrients are the body's main source of fuel for moving, breathing, thinking, and learning. Our hearts, lungs, brains, and nervous systems need a constant supply of nutrient-rich carbohydrates (also called carbs) to function properly. Whole grain breads, cereals, crackers, and tortillas are some of the best sources of these 'good carbs.'

5. B-VITAMINS and TRACE MINERALS

B-vitamins help your body process carbohydrate energy; they work like spark plugs that help your car use gasoline efficiently. Trace minerals are nutrients that we need in very small amounts. Fortunately, whole grains contain three important trace minerals - copper, iron, and zinc - for healthy hearts, blood vessels, and wound healing.