

Celebrate Whole Grains Month

Fall for New Ways to Enjoy Whole Grains

By Lois Ahrens
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For many, September is a time of transition -- moving from the lazy days of summer with fewer responsibilities to busy lives shuffling from school to after-school activities. Now is a great time to include food in this transition, as you jump-start the school year and eat for optimal performance. September is Whole Grains Month and an opportunity to incorporate new choices into new routines.

Whole grain foods are the whole package. Unlike refined grains found in many commercial food products, whole grains contain the entire kernel including the bran, germ and endosperm. All their vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber working together are important for good health. Add in the crunchy, chewy texture of whole grains and you have energy-packed food designed for growing bodies and engaging minds.

Increasing your whole grain intake can be as easy as substituting some of your refined grain foods with whole grain products. For example:

- If your ready-to-eat breakfast cereal doesn't contain whole grains, try combining your current favorite with a whole grain choice such as Cheerios or Wheat Chex. Looking for a hot morning meal? Oatmeal, whether it's instant, quick or just plain rolled is 100% whole grain. Or consider making your favorite pancake recipe with whole wheat pastry flour instead of white.
- When shopping for bread, look beyond brown. Brown bread, even bread with nuts or grains on top, may not be whole grain. Look for labels where the first ingredient is "whole," as in *whole* wheat or *whole* rye. Labels with "multi-grain," "seven-grain," or "cracked wheat" are usually not whole grain. To ease the transition with kids, try packing sandwiches for lunch with one slice of whole grain bread and one slice of white bread.
- Whole grain crackers such as Wasa, Triscuit, and Ry-Crisp along with popcorn are all whole grain foods. Couple these foods with low-fat cheese and fruit to create a snack that travels well to after-school activities.
- Dinner time offers an abundance of whole grain options. Consider adding brown rice, wild rice, or barley to your favorite canned or homemade soups. Buy whole grain pasta or, if your family's palette needs time to adjust, start by mixing regular with whole grain pasta and pair with a hearty tomato sauce. Swap out white flour tortillas on taco night with whole wheat or corn tortillas. Top casseroles with whole grain bread crumbs or crushed whole grain cereals. Incorporating $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

uncooked oats per pound of ground beef or turkey in meatballs or meatloaf goes unnoticed to most eaters, yet adds the goodness of whole grain.

- For inquisitive tastes and adventurous cooks, there are many less familiar whole grains to experience. Consider replacing white rice with bulgur, millet, quinoa or sorghum in risottos, pilafs and other rice-like dishes. Try substituting half your white flour with whole wheat flour in recipes for muffins, quick bread and cookies.

Including whole grains, even small amounts, can start you on your way to meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans of eating “half your grains as whole grains.” With the fuller, nuttier taste of whole grains, you may even begin to view some of your old favorites as surprisingly bland!

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