

A BACIS GUIDE TO WHOLE GRAINS



Photo:iStock/864546308

Many of us have heard that we should avoid eating grains. The theory is twofold; first, that grains are high in carbohydrates which could lead to weight gain, cause insulin resistance and increase our chance of serious diseases and health conditions. The second theory is that consuming grains may cause inflammation in the body due to lectins in grains.

It is true that many high carbohydrate foods easily available to us (such as sugary snacks, cereals, white bread and other baked goods) generally contain *refined or highly-processed grains* and sugar. These foods can cause the serious health issues stated in the first example.

Whole grains are a different story - they are considered a beneficial carb providing antioxidants, fiber, B vitamins and minerals which can actually lower the risk of many serious diseases. In addition, research has not yet confirmed a link between whole grains and inflammation.

(see - [Best Grains for Arthritis](#) from www.arthritis.org)

Keep in mind, as with any food or nutrition advice, one size does not fit all. Some bodies do react negatively when grains are consumed, particularly grains that contain gluten. If that is the case, it is best, if not critical, that they are avoided.

If you are able to consume whole grains without any negative consequences, they can be an important part of a well-balanced, healthy diet, helping with weight loss, and lessening the risk of disease and other health issues.

What makes a whole grain?

According to the [Whole Grain Council](#) -

“A grain is considered to be a whole grain as long as all three original parts – the bran, germ, and endosperm – are still present in the same proportions as when the grain was growing in the fields.”

BUYING AND STORING

A large variety of whole grains are available at grocery stores, co-ops, specialty food stores and online making them easily available.

- Buying grains in bulk generally saves money. It is best to purchase from retailers that have good turn over to get the freshest grains.
- If buying prepackaged whole grains, check the “sell by” date.
- Fresh grains may have no aroma or smell slightly sweet; do not purchase if they smell oily, musty or sour.
- Choose containers that provide an air-tight seal (glass, plastic, zip-lock) to keep out moisture and air. This prolongs the shelf life of the grain.
- Label the container with the name and purchase date. It is also helpful to include general cooking instructions.
- Store whole grains in a cool, dry, dark place like a pantry or other storage area off the floor. Grains can be stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

- Whole grains generally last up to 6 months in a pantry, or up to a year if frozen.

For information on shelf life of specific grains, check out this handy chart on the Whole Grain Council website - [Storing Whole Grains](#).



HOW TO USE

- Serve as a side dish, in a salad, soups and stews, baked goods, as a base for an entrée, or in a breakfast dish.
- Give your favorite recipes a new twist by replacing plain all or part of the rice with a new whole grain such as barley, bulgur or farro.

Stove top method preparation -

Although it varies by grain type, generally use 1 ½ - 2 cups liquid per 1 cup whole grain.

- Place the desired amount of grain in a sauce pan
- Add appropriate amount of water or broth
- Cover pan. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to low simmer.
- Simmer until liquid is absorbed - anywhere from 20 - 55 minutes. If the grain is tender (to your liking) it is ready! If not, add a small amount of water and continue to cook. Any excess water can be drained away.

Whole grains can also be prepared in rice cookers and Instant Pots. For more information on cooking whole grains, check out these handy guides from the Whole Grain Council -

[Whole Grain Cooking Tips](#)

[Cooking and Eating Gluten Free Whole Grains](#)

FUN FOOD FACT

[Bob's Red Mill](#), my favorite whole grain source, takes great care in producing high quality whole grains. They offer the largest line of organic whole grain foods in the United States with over 40 varieties of packaged individual and blended whole grains including - quinoa, freekeh, farro, oats, amaranth, wild rice, millet, bulgur, spelt, and rice just to name a few!

For an interesting culinary adventure, tour the factory or visit the Whole Grain Store, just outside of Portland, OR.

RECIPE: Multi-Grain Breakfast Porridge

For this "comfort in a bowl" breakfast, the coconut milk provides a non-dairy creaminess and inviting flavor dimension. Dark fruits such as fresh blueberries and blackberries or dried cranberries, along with a drizzle of a high-quality fruit balsamic, are the perfect finishing touch or go tropical with fresh or dried sweet mango and toasted coconut flakes. For a **gluten-free option**, use millet instead of farro.