

## **EXTENSION CONNECTION - 2005 dietary guidelines support whole grains**

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### **Q. What are whole grains and what are their benefits to my diet?**

**A.** In the 1990s, low-fat/no-fat diets were popular. The current decade began with an emphasis on low carb/no carb.

The recently released 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* encourage eating more whole grains. These guidelines are updated every five years by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services.

The new recommendations push for an increase in whole-grain consumption – at least half of our grain intake should come from whole grains. What are whole grains? In what foods can you find them? Why should they be an important part of your diet?

Whole grains such as brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-grain breads and cereals contain all three parts of the grain – the bran, the germ, and the endosperm. More refined grains typically contain just the endosperm. Because they contain all three parts of the grain, whole grain foods break down more slowly in the body. Carbohydrates enter the body slower, and it's easier for your body to regulate them.

Whole grains are high in fiber. Foods high in fiber are beneficial because they are filling and discourage overeating. When combined with adequate fluid, they help food move through the digestive system and protect against gut cancers and constipation. Unlike processed equivalents, whole grains are packed with vitamins and minerals such as essential fatty acids, vitamin E, magnesium, and zinc.

The grain group on the food guide pyramid, however, has been criticized in recent years. Many experts think excess consumption of refined carbohydrates is one reason behind the rise of obesity in the United States. How could one type of food cause such a big problem?

Not exercising and eating larger portions of any foods than we need could contribute. But refined carbohydrates tend to be significant contributors to excess calories because

they're easy to get our hands on, they come in large portions, and they aren't too filling. It's not that they cause us to gain weight; it is that we tend to eat more of them than we need. Truly sugary foods such as colas and candy provide no required nutrients, so we really don't need to eat them at all.

**Q. What do I look for on food labels to know I am getting whole grains?**

**A.** Keep an eye out for any of these listed as the first item in the ingredients. Brown rice, Buckwheat, Cracked wheat (also called bulgur), Graham flour, Millet, Popcorn, Sorghum, Whole barley, Whole cornmeal, Whole-grain barley, Whole-grain corn, Whole oats/oatmeal, Whole rye, Whole wheat and Wild rice.

Be wary of misleading claims on packages. Don't be fooled by things that look or sound like whole grain but are not. For example, "multi-grain" isn't whole grain. Just because a food is brown doesn't mean it's made out of whole grains. It may just be dyed.

Remember, you need carbohydrates for energy from not only grains, but also fruits, vegetables, and dairy. These foods provide a range of essential nutrients that support good health.

Call me at the Webster County Extension Office, 515-576-2119, or E-mail [pgilbert@iastate.edu](mailto:pgilbert@iastate.edu), with your nutrition and health questions. You may also call our toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804 or visit the Webster County Extension web site: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/webster>.