

Whole Grains and Heart Health



Whole grains include all the nutrient-packed parts of the original grain. This is what makes them “whole.” On the other hand, refined or processed grains (like white rice or white flour) usually remove fiber and other important nutrients.

For good heart health, aim to eat at least 3 ounces of whole grains each day. At least half of your daily grain servings should be whole grains.

The Benefits of Whole Grains

Whole grains add texture and flavor to your meals. Eating whole grains may also help you:

- Reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Lower your cholesterol
- Manage your weight
- Increase the amount of nutrients you eat

What Counts as a Serving of Whole Grain?

Recommendations for the number of servings of whole grain you should eat are usually counted in ounces per day. A 1-ounce serving of whole grain is equal to:

- ½ cup cooked brown rice, wild rice, or another cooked whole grain, such as bulgur or quinoa
- 1 slice 100% whole grain bread
- ½ cup cooked 100% whole grain pasta
- ½ cup cooked whole grain hot cereal, such as oatmeal
- 1 cup 100% whole grain ready-to-eat cereal

How Can I Tell If a Food Has Whole Grains?

- **Read the ingredients list.** The ingredients list for a whole grain food will list the word “whole” before the grain. Also, the whole grain will be the first item on the list. For example, look for whole wheat flour, whole oat, or whole rye as the first ingredient.
- **Check for label claims.** Look for products that boast **100%** whole grain. Some foods may have a “Whole Grain stamp.” A “100% Whole Grain stamp” means that one serving of the food has at least 16 grams (one serving) of whole grains. A plain “Whole Grain stamp” (without 100%) shows that a food has at least 8 grams (½ serving) of whole grains.

Tips for Eating More Whole Grains

- Choose whole grain pasta instead of pasta made with refined flour. Start by mixing equal amounts of whole grain pasta and regular pasta. Gradually switch to using only whole grain pasta as you get used to its taste and texture.
- Switch to whole grain breads, tortillas, and pitas.
- Substitute whole wheat flour for half of the white flour in your favorite recipes for baked goods, such as muffins, breads, pancakes, or cookies.
- When preparing meatballs or burgers, add ¾ cup of uncooked oats for every 1 pound of ground beef or turkey.
- Top salads with whole grains, such as quinoa, barley, or bulgur.
- Choose brown rice or wild rice instead of white rice.

