



# BLEND Food Group Focus

## Grains

“Make Half Your Grains Whole”

### Importance of Grains

Eating grains, especially whole grains, provides health benefits. People who eat whole grains as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases. Grains provide good sources of **dietary fiber**, **carbohydrates**, and several **B vitamins** and trace **minerals**, which are vital for the health and maintenance of our bodies.

- Consuming foods rich in dietary fiber, such as whole grains, as part of a healthy diet, reduces the risk of coronary heart disease and helps reduce blood cholesterol levels. Fiber is also important for proper bowel function.
- B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folate) play a key role in metabolism – they help the body release energy from protein, fat, and carbohydrates. B vitamins are also essential for a healthy nervous system. Folate (folic acid), another B vitamin, helps the body form red blood cells. This reduces the risk of neural tube defects, spina bifida, and anencephaly during fetal development.
- Eating at least 3 ounce equivalents a day of whole grains may help with weight management – whole grains help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories
- Carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy.

### What Foods Are In the Grain Group?

Whole Grain Foods		
Brown Rice Bulgur (cracked wheat) Whole Grain Corn Meal Oatmeal	Popcorn Quinoa Buckwheat and Whole Barley Whole Cornmeal	Whole Rye Whole Oats Whole Wheat Bread, Pasta, Crackers, and Tortillas
Refined Grain Foods		
<i>Pasta*</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spaghetti</li> <li>• macaroni</li> </ul> <i>Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corn flakes</li> </ul>	pretzels crackers* couscous* cornbread* corn tortillas*	flour tortillas* grits pitas* white bread, buns, and rolls white rice.
<p><i>*Most of these products are made from refined grains. Some are made from whole grains. Check the ingredient list for the words “whole grain” or “whole wheat” to decide if they are made from a whole grain. Some foods are made from a mixture of whole and refined grains.</i></p>		

### Fiber...

- *Is not digested but it absorbs moisture and travels through the digestive system.*
- *Makes the bowel movement much easier inside your body.*
- *Makes body waste softer and eliminates it more frequently.*
- *Can help to avoid colon cancer as it can flush toxins from the intestines.*
- *Keeps intestines healthy.*

### What Are Whole Grains and Refined Grains?

There are two classes of grain foods: whole grains and refined grains.

**Whole Grains** contain the entire grain seed – **bran, endosperm and germ**. The outside bran layer contains the greatest amount of fiber.

- Whole grain foods are higher in fiber and other protective substances like antioxidants and phytochemicals compared to refined grains.
- Eating whole grain foods can help reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers.
- Whole grains may also play a role in helping people manage their weight and diabetes.

**Refined Grains** have been milled and the bran and germ removed, like white bread flour, white rice, and degermed cornmeal.

- Refined grains go through a process that strips them of some of their nutrients, including the outside bran layer.

## USDA MyPyramid Recommendations

The amount of grains you need each day depends on your age, gender, and activity level. Look at the chart below to find the recommended amount of grains for you. Remember to make half your grains whole.

Age		Daily Recommendation*	
		(ounce equivalents)	
		Total Daily	Whole Grains
Children	2 to 3 years	3	1 ½
	4 to 8 years	4 to 5	2 to 2 ½
Girls	9 to 13 years	5	3
	14 to 18 years	6	3
Boys	9 to 13 years	6	3
	14 to 18 years	7	3 ½
Women	19 to 30 years	6	3
	31 to 50 years	6	3
	51+ years	5	3
Men	19 to 30 years	8	4
	31 to 50 years	7	3 ½
	51+ years	6	3

\*Amounts are for those who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity beyond normal daily activities. Visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) for more information

### What Counts As an Ounce of Grain?

In general, 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, cooked pasta, or cooked cereal can be considered as 1 ounce equivalent from the grains group.

The following lists specific amounts that count as 1 ounce equivalent of grains towards your daily recommended intake.

#### 1 ounce equivalents include:

- 5 whole-wheat crackers or 7 square or round crackers
- 1 small (2 inch diameter) buttermilk biscuit
- 1 mini bagel (2 ½ inch diameter)
- 1 small muffin (2 ½ inch diameter)
- ½ cup cooked oatmeal
- 3 cups popped popcorn
- 1 small (6 inch) flour or corn tortilla

To learn more about the **Grain Group**, visit the USDA's MyPyramid website at: [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov). While you are there, check out the MyFoodapedia link. MyFoodapedia offers quick access to food information – helping you find food groups, calories, and comparisons.



### Helpful Hints!

- Just because it's brown doesn't mean it's whole grain!
- Look for the words "whole grain," "whole (name of grain)," "whole wheat."
- Popcorn, oatmeal, and brown rice are always whole grains.
- The word "enriched" does not mean it is a whole grain. It is, in fact, refined!

### Tips to Help You Eat Whole Grains

- **Substitute** a whole-grain product for a refined product – such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice.
- **Use** whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soup or stews and bulgur wheat in casseroles or stir-fries.
- **Experiment** by substituting whole wheat or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancake, waffle, muffin, or other flour-based recipes.
- **Snack** on ready-to-eat, whole grain cereals such as toasted oat cereal.
- **Add** whole-grain flour or oatmeal when making cookies or other baked treats.
- **Try** a whole-grain snack chip, such as baked tortilla chips.
- **Popcorn**, a whole grain, can be a healthy snack with little or no added salt and butter.