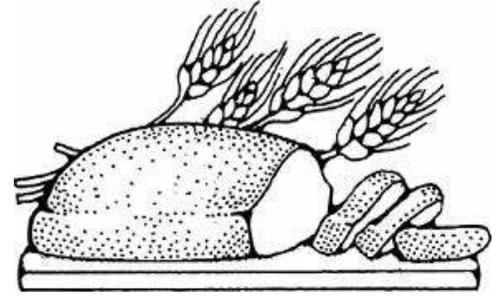


Grains of wisdom

Grain food has had a significant place in our diets and our culture, ever since the first grains were sown thousands of years ago. Despite the old saying that ‘man cannot live on bread alone’, in many developing countries grains represent almost the entire diet of the population. Even in more affluent societies, they still form a large percentage of the food consumed. No wonder grain food has been called the staff of life.

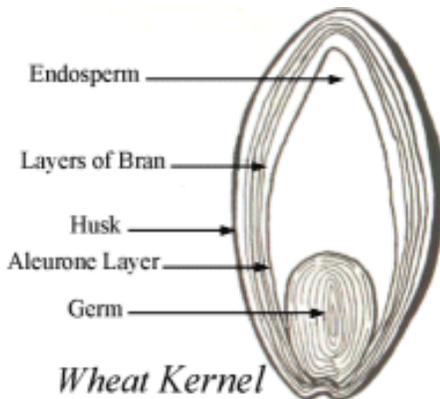


At the peak of the low carbohydrate diet craze a while ago, it seemed that grain food might lose its claim to a place on our tables. Fortunately, the fad has faded - as all fads do - and grain food has weathered the storm well.

Eating food for the enjoyment of it is a simple thing, choosing it for health benefits is anything but! To meet the wave of enthusiasm for whole-grain food, the food industry has churned out its customary array of new products, advertisements and marketing hype. The result is the confusing and sometimes misleading information the food packaging provides to its customers.

Here are some ‘grains of wisdom’ to help you to gather a few available grains of truth so that you can make an informed choice. ‘Knowledge is power’, informed choice is a better choice.

Grains are the edible part of cereal plants, they are actually fruits. A few plant products eaten in the same way as grains, such as buckwheat, amaranth, quinoa etc. are included in the cereal classification as pseudo cereals, they are not the fruits of grasses but the fruits of broadleaf plants.



A whole grain has three components: the bran, the endosperm, and the germ. The nutritional properties of grains such as wheat, oats, rye, barley, corn, millet, rice, sorghum, and others, vary, depending on the producing plant. In general, the **bran**, or outer coat of the grain is rich in fiber, B vitamins, and minerals. The **endosperm**, which is the part of the grain used in making refined flours, provides mostly carbohydrate energy, along with some protein. The **germ** provides unsaturated oils, vitamin E, more B vitamins, and other micro-nutrients including antioxidants. A whole grain product is a highly nutritious food, as it is made from all three components of the grain. Products made from refined grains are no more than just delivery vehicles for mainly calories.

Let’s go shopping for a loaf of bread. Just have a look at what the package says. Wheat bread is not necessarily ‘whole’ wheat bread. 5-grain, multi-grain, and 10, 12 or 15-grain breads may, or may not, contain a large proportion of whole grain. Apparently it is legal (unfortunately not altogether honest!) to label a bread “multi-grain” even though it is made from multiple *refined* grains. Nutritionally, this is white grain bread in a fancy package. You can’t rely on color either. Brown breads are often made from refined flour, made dark by the addition of molasses. It is a good idea to look for the word ‘whole’ preceding the name of the grain on the ingredient list. If it doesn’t say whole grain, most likely it isn’t. On the nutrition facts panel, look at the fiber content. Most whole grains are concentrated fiber sources. If a whole-grain product provides less than 3 grams of fiber per 100 grams, it is quite likely to be a whole-grain impostor. It’s interesting to note that whole meal bread often contains more fiber than multi grain bread. Lastly, choose simple, wholesome breads with shorter ingredient lists. Bread can be made from just flour, water, and yeast. A pinch of salt is a reasonable addition and so is a small amount of unsaturated vegetable oil - although this is not necessary. Emulsifiers and texturizers are common in commercial breads. Beyond this, take note of most other additions.

The more ‘grains of wisdom’ we sow, the more we reap the rewards of better choices. The food industry will be more obliged to offer wholesome and more nutritious whole-grain products.

Having said all that, I have a confession to make: I just love a crusty loaf of bread made from *plain white* dough, served with lots of fresh butter. Yum! Eating just for the pure enjoyment of it. Why not?