

All About Grains

By Karen Hallford, MS, RD

When you think about foods in the grain group you may think of cereals, breads and rice. Those are the most common grains we eat on a daily basis. The word Grains may also lead you to think of the buzz word “whole grains”. Eating whole grains as part of a healthy diet is nothing new. Over the past several years companies have been highlighting that aspect as a positive nutritional benefit when their products meet the criteria. And without a doubt, whole grains are certainly good for us. But refined grains play a role in a healthy diet as well. See, refined grains are enriched with additional vitamins and minerals that our bodies need too. So a healthy balance of both should truly be our goal.

Grains are grasses that are grown for their edible seeds and are a pretty stable crop at that. They provide more food energy than any other crop in the world. Rye, oats, wheat, corn, sorghum, and barley are all in the grain group. And any food made from wheat, rice, cornmeal, barley, or other cereal grains is part of the grain group too. The grain group is divided into 2 subgroups: whole grains and refined grains.

Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel, which includes the bran, the germ, and the endosperm. Whole grain products have more fiber than refined grain products. At least half of the grain products we eat should be whole grain leaving the other half as refined. Refined grains have had the bran and germ removed through a process called milling, which is done to give the grains a finer texture and improve shelf life. And after refining, many of these grain products are then enriched, meaning the vitamins and minerals have been added back in.

Foods from the grain group are measured in ounces. 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta, or cooked cereal is considered 1 oz equivalent from the grains group. See the chart below for specifics on daily recommendations for our kids:

Children 4-8	4-5 oz equivalents
Girls 9-13	5 oz equivalents
Girls 14-18	6 oz equivalents
Boys 9-13	6 oz equivalents
Boys 14-18	7 oz equivalents

Working grains into your family’s diet can be easy, as there are many options to choose from. See the chart below for all the different varieties grouped by Whole Grains and Refined Grains:

Whole Grain Products	Refined Grain Products
Brown rice	Cornbread
Buckwheat	Corn tortillas
Bulgur	Couscous
Oatmeal	Crackers
Popcorn	Flour tortillas
Whole wheat breakfast cereal	Grits
Whole grain barley	Pasta
Whole grain cornmeal	Pitas

Whole rye	Pretzels
Whole wheat bread	Breakfast cereals
Whole wheat crackers	White bread
Whole wheat pasta	White rice
Whole wheat tortillas	Bagels
Wild rice	Pastries

With so many different shapes, sizes and flavor profiles within the grain group, you are sure to find a good balance of both types of grain to keep your family healthy and happy!