

Fibre, Wholegrain Cereals and Cancer Risk



Key Messages

Eating a healthy diet can reduce the risk of a number of diseases including some cancers.

Getting enough fibre each day is an important part of eating well and eating wholegrain foods is a good way of ensuring you get enough fibre.

Wholegrain foods can contribute to a healthy digestive system, help with weight control and reduce the risk of getting diabetes and heart disease. It is also likely to help reduce the risk of some cancers, especially bowel cancer.

Studies have shown that people who eat wholegrain foods regularly are less likely to develop bowel cancer.

What is fibre?

Fibre is a complex mix of substances and is contained only in plant foods - breads and cereals, especially wholegrain varieties, fruits and vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Wholegrain foods also contain natural protective substances such as antioxidants and phytochemicals and are an important way of getting B vitamins. Wholegrain foods help prevent constipation and encourage the growth of good bacteria in the bowel. They also make you feel fuller for longer making weight control easier.

While white bread and other refined cereals contain some fibre and some of the other protective substances they have a lot less than wholegrain varieties. Refined cereals have the outer layers, the bran and germ, which are rich in fibre and nutrients removed so those important nutrients are lost.

Wholegrain foods include:

- Wholemeal or multigrain bread, muffins, pita bread, bagels
- Oats - porridge, muesli
- Wholegrain or whole-wheat breakfast cereals (e.g. branflakes, weetbix)
- Wholemeal or mixed grain crackers and crispbread
- Brown rice
- Wholemeal pasta
- Cracked wheat (bulgur)
- Foods made with corn, barley, rye, millet

How much should I eat?

Adults should eat 6 to 8 servings of bread and cereals each day. Try to make at least half of these wholegrain - more if you can. Breads and cereals are carbohydrate foods and an important way of getting energy as well as fibre.

What is a serving?

- 1 cup of wholegrain cereal flakes
- ½ cup porridge or muesli
- 1 cup of cooked brown rice or wholemeal pasta
- 1 weetbix
- 1 slice of wholemeal, wholegrain or multigrain bread
- 1 wholemeal roll
- 3 -4 wholegrain crackers/crisp bread

Ways to increase wholegrain foods

Breakfast

- Have wholegrain, wholemeal or multigrain toast instead of white toast or muffins.
- Choose a bran or wholewheat cereal, muesli or porridge.

Lunch

- Choose wholemeal, wholewheat or multigrain bread, rolls, pita bread or bagels for toast or sandwiches. Add salad vegetables for extra fibre
- Enjoy corn on the cob or canned corn on wholemeal/grain toast or in sandwiches
- Include brown rice, wholemeal pasta or tabouli (bulgur wheat) in salads or soups

Dinner

- Use brown rice instead of white for curries, with casseroles or in salads
- Try wholemeal pasta and lasagne
- If you have bread make it wholemeal or mixed grain
- Have corn as a vegetable
- If you are using breadcrumbs in a recipe (e.g. meatballs) use wholemeal/wholegrain bread. Oats can also be used to make meatloaf etc.
- Thicken sauces, gravies and casseroles with wholemeal flour
- Use oats and/or wholemeal flour in baked puddings. Try toasted muesli as a crunchy topping on fruit, yoghurt or custard

Snacks

- Have wholegrain crackers or crisp bread that is low in fat and salt
- Have a muesli bar but check the label and look for low levels of fat and sugar
- Try popcorn (but limit salt and butter)
- Add some muesli to low fat yoghurt
- Use wholemeal flour or add bran, wheat germ or oats in baking

Changing to Wholegrain

If you are not used to wholegrain cereals and breads try mixing half wholegrain/half white flour/cereals and gradually increase the proportion as you get used to it.

What about white bread?

While white bread contains less fibre and less of the other beneficial substances found with fibre, all bread is still a good source of carbohydrate, energy, B vitamins and protein. Look for high fibre white bread.

What about fibre supplements?

Wholegrain foods contain a complex mix of nutrients and substances which all work together to improve health. Not all of these are contained in commercially prepared fibre supplements. It is better to get fibre from food.

If you are constipated it is better to eat more fruit, vegetables and grain-based foods, drink more fluids and get some daily physical activity than it is to rely on supplements.

Revised March 2009