

# Parent Communications— Whole Grains

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## Get the Whole Story on Whole Grains

Good carbohydrate, bad carbohydrate. Americans have been hearing a lot about carbohydrate, or "carbs," mostly from the weight-loss industry. But there's more to the carbohydrate story than weight control, and it's all about the health benefits of whole grains.

Whole-grain foods contain good carbohydrate. They're packed with complex carbohydrate, fiber, and other nutrients to keep your blood sugar steady, your cholesterol low, and your digestive system working well. That's why eating a diet rich in whole grains can mean less diabetes, heart disease, colon cancer, and diverticular disease. While these disorders are mostly seen in adults, a growing number of children are affected by type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. This, combined with a growing trend of kids eating more processed foods that are high in fat, salt, and added sugar, makes childhood the perfect time for children to practice healthful eating habits.

What are whole grains? Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, or barley is a grain product. Think pastas, breads, cereals, and tortillas. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel. Examples are whole wheat flour, whole oats, cracked (bulgur) wheat, whole cornmeal, and brown rice.

Refined grains have been milled, a process that removes a part of the grain kernel to achieve a finer texture. As a result of this process, much of the fiber and nutrients are stripped away. Examples of refined-grain products are white bread, white rice, and pasta. Enriched white flour has had some of the B vitamins and iron added back, but the fiber and many other healthy nutrients are not.

Make at least half your grains whole. If you shop for your family's food, try to purchase grain foods made from whole grains at least half of the time. To do that you need to look for key words on the food labels, including the ingredient list. Here's how you do it.

Read the nutrition label. Choose breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. Fiber content is a good indicator of whether a grain has been milled or not. Food with more fiber probably has more of the good stuff from the grain hull in it.

Read the ingredient list. Choose breads and cereals that list a whole grain as the first ingredient. Examples of whole grains are whole wheat, cracked wheat, barley, oats, rye, brown rice, whole cornmeal, and millet.

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Watch out for misleading terms. Foods labeled as *multigrain*, *100% wheat*, *made with whole grains*, *cracked wheat*, and *seven grain* often are not made with mostly whole grains.

Watch out for added sugar, especially in ready-to-eat breakfast cereals and so-called breakfast bars. Choose products low or moderate in sugar—5 to 10 grams per serving most of the time. Save the sweet stuff for an occasional treat or mix it with a low-sugar cereal to cut back on the sugar.

Optional sidebar:

## **Examples of Ready-to-Eat Cereals With High Fiber or Low Sugar**

### **► EXAMPLES OF READY-TO-EAT CEREALS HIGH IN FIBER OR LOW IN SUGAR**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Fiber (grams per serving)</b>	<b>Sugar (grams per serving)</b>
Chex, wheat	5g fiber	5g sugar
Cheerios	3g fiber	1g sugar
Total	3g fiber	5g sugar
Wheaties	3g fiber	4g sugar

Optional e-mail message: Use this sample message to communicate with parents by e-mail (if available).

### **Subject Line: Healthy Habits Power Tips—Go for Whole Grains**

Dear (insert school name and grade) Parents,

Did you know that popcorn is a whole-grain snack? This week your children will explore the world of whole grains through the *Eat Well & Keep Moving* lesson Carb Smart. Our key messages will be the following:

- Flavor and fiber: Get it all with whole grains.
- Processed grains do not have as much good stuff, especially fiber.
- Breakfast is a great time to try whole grains (e.g., cereals, waffles, or whole wheat bagels).

Whole-grain breads and cereals are packed with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and flavor. They keep you feeling full longer, and they have many benefits for disease prevention and intestinal health.

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You can help your family enjoy whole grains by following these Healthy Habits Power Tips:

- ▶ Make at least half your grains whole grains. This includes whole-grain breads, breakfast cereals, brown rice, bulgur, barley, oats, and corn (with the kernel).
- ▶ When purchasing whole-grain cereals and breads, read the label to be sure that a whole grain is the first ingredient listed and that the product has at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.
- ▶ Know that not all whole-grain (ready-to-eat) breakfast cereals are equally nutritious. Many cereals labeled *whole grain* are also very high in sugar. Choose cereals (at least most of the time) that are either low in sugar (5 grams or less) or moderate in sugar (up to 10 grams) per serving.
- ▶ Set a good example by serving whole grains with meals and snacks.

Check out the following Web sites for good information on carbohydrate and your child.

Harvard School of Public Health

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates.html)

Nemours Foundation

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_fit/nutrition/sugar.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/nutrition/sugar.html)

USDA Food Pyramid

[www.MyPyramid.gov/pyramid/grains.html](http://www.MyPyramid.gov/pyramid/grains.html)