Get the Whole Story on Whole Grains

Recent research has linked the consumption of whole grains with notable health benefits including risk reduction of several chronic diseases and help with weight maintenance. As a result, nutrition experts are advising individuals to choose whole grain foods over refined grain foods. “Unfortunately, research shows that many people are confused about the difference between a whole grain food and a refined grain food,” says Dr. Sharon Robinson, Nutrition Specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension.

Grain foods are made from seed kernels such as wheat, corn, oats, and rice. Kernels, such as corn, contain an outer bran layer that is rich in dietary fiber and minerals; a germ layer rich in healthful oils and vitamins as well as the starchy inner portion called the endosperm. Foods made from whole grains contain all the nutrients found in the original kernel. Examples of whole grain foods are whole wheat bread, corn tortillas, shredded wheat breakfast cereal, popped corn, oatmeal and brown rice.

Sometimes, as with refined grains, the kernel’s bran and germ are removed during milling. This results in a loss of dietary fiber and some of the vitamins and minerals from the original kernel. Manufacturers add some vitamins and minerals to the milled product. Enriched grains are refined grains with added nutrients. Examples of enriched grain foods are white bread, biscuits, corn bread, and white rice.

How many grain foods should you eat each day? Most people should eat about three ounces of whole grain foods each day and about three ounces of enriched grain foods each day. To determine how much you should eat based on your age, gender and physical activity level visit [http://www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

When shopping for grain foods, look for ‘whole grain’ on the packaging. The Food and Drug Administration requires that a product contain at least 51% whole grain in order for that product to be marketed as whole grain.

Texas Cooperative Extension offers nutrition education events in your area. To learn more, contact your local Family and Consumer Science County Extension Agent.