

Grains, grains, grain - 'whole' are the best

By MARY WELCH-BEZEMEK Special to this Newspaper/Imperial Valley | Posted: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 12:10 am

Think about how many servings of whole grains you ate today. If you're like most Americans, you had just one, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

After nearly a decade of sounding the call to eat more fruits and vegetables, USDA is now making a push to boost whole-grain consumption to at least three 1-ounce servings daily (or half your total grain servings).



Mary Welch Bezemek

It may be the smartest thing you can do for your heart, not to mention your waistline. As you see here on MyPlate, portions/servings of grains are greater than that of protein.

For this week's challenge, try making half of your grains whole! What foods are in the grain group? Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas and grits are examples of grain products.

Grains are divided into two subgroups: whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel — the bran, germ and endosperm. Examples of whole grains include whole wheat flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), oatmeal, whole cornmeal and brown rice.

Refined grains have been milled, a process that removes the bran and germ. This is done to give grains a finer texture and improve their shelf life, but it also removes dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Some examples of refined grain products are white flour, de-germed cornmeal, white bread and white rice. Most refined grains are enriched. This means certain B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid) and iron are added back after processing. Fiber is not added back to enriched grains.

Check the ingredient list on refined grain products to make sure that the word "enriched" is included in the grain name. Some food products are made from mixtures of whole grains and refined grains.

Approximate serving sizes for children under 17 years of age is three to four servings per day and six servings per day for adults. Why is it important to eat grains, especially whole grains? Eating

grains, especially whole grains, provides health benefits. People who eat whole grains as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases.

Grains provide many nutrients that are vital for the health and maintenance of our bodies. Some of these nutrients include B vitamins, iron and magnesium. Dietary fiber from whole grains or other foods may help reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Fiber containing foods such as whole grains help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories. Eating whole grains may also help with weight management.

Here are some tips to help you eat whole grains at meals: 1) To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole grain product for a refined product — such as eating whole wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice. It's important to substitute the whole grain product for the refined one, rather than adding the whole grain product. 2) Use whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soup or stews and bulgur wheat in casserole or stir-fries. 3) Experiment by substituting whole wheat or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancake, waffle, muffin or other flour-based recipes. 4) Try rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole grain cereal as breading for baked chicken, fish or eggplant Parmesan.

As snacks: snack on ready-to-eat, whole grain cereals such as toasted oat cereal. Add whole grain flour or oatmeal when making cookies or other baked treats. Try 100 percent whole grain snack crackers. Popcorn is a whole grain which can be a healthy snack if made with little or no added salt and butter. Choose foods that name one of the whole grain ingredients first on the label's ingredient list such as brown rice, buckwheat, oatmeal, quinoa and whole grain barley. This week's recipe is:

100 percent whole wheat blueberry muffins

Ingredients:

2 1/4 cups whole wheat flour

1 cup brown sugar

3/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1 cup blueberries, fresh or frozen

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1 1/2 cups buttermilk or plain yogurt (not Greek)

Directions: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Lightly grease the cups of a standard muffin pan; or line with paper baking cups. Whisk together all of the dry ingredients, including the blueberries. In a separate bowl, whisk together the vanilla, vegetable oil and buttermilk or yogurt. Pour the liquid ingredients into the dry ingredients, stirring just to combine. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin cups, filling them nearly full. Bake the muffins for 18-20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the middle of one of the center muffins comes out clean. Remove the muffins from the oven, and after 5 minutes (or when they are cool enough to handle) transfer them to a rack to cool. Serve warm, or at room temperature

I hope you enjoy this recipe as it is one of my favorites. Remember, Make 1/2 your grains whole this week.

Mary Welch-Bezemek is a registered dietician and nutrition program coordinator for CalFresh, through the University of California Cooperative Extension.