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Going for the (whole) grains

Including three servings of these carbohydrate-rich foods in your daily diet will provide multiple benefits

Editor's note: This nutrition column appears the first Tuesday of the month on the Food page.

Carbohydrate-rich foods, once considered the source of all weight gain, are now back in everyday diets.

Including three servings of whole grains in your daily intake rounds out a healthful diet that will fill you up and keep you running at peak performance during your busy day.

Whole grains provide carbohydrates that fuel our bodies and give us energy. Whole grains also provide fiber, which helps us feel full longer and keeps our bowels regular.

They also provide vitamins, phytochemicals and antioxidants that help prevent disease.

Grain seeds consist of bran,

endosperm and germ layers. Whole grains contain all three layers and their naturally occurring nutrients.

The bran layer is filled with fiber, vitamins and minerals. This layer is removed when grains are refined, such as occurs in the process used to produce white flour.

The endosperm layer contains digestible carbohydrates as well as B vitamins. The germ layer contains small amounts of unsaturated fats, vitamin E as well as phytochemicals and antioxidants.

Some breads appear to be whole grain, but a careful look at the ingredient list will help determine if the product is indeed a whole grain. Look for ingredients such as 100 percent whole wheat, oats, rye, brown or



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wild rice, whole-grain corn or barley on the label.

Terms such as 100 percent wheat, multigrain, stone-ground or enriched do not always mean breads are whole grain; rather, they have been made with wheat, more than one grain, ground by stones or enriched with nutrients typically removed during processing of the grain.

Another clue that a product is whole grain is to look at the dietary fiber listed on the nutrition label. Products made from whole grains will have 3 or more grams of fiber per serving listed under "total carbohydrate" on the Nutrition Facts.

Whole grains help you feel

full longer because the fiber fills your stomach and is slowly digested. This can help with managing weight. Studies have shown that the more whole grains are in a diet, the less a person weighs.

Whole grains are more slowly digested than refined grains. This prevents rapid absorption of carbohydrates, which keeps blood glucose levels lower after meals.

Studies have shown that including whole grains in our diet will lower our risk for developing heart disease. A diet high in whole grains has been found to reduce blood pressure as well as total cholesterol and LDL, or "bad" cholesterol.

In addition, subjects who ate three or more servings of whole grains every day had lower levels of C-reactive protein, which is a pro-inflammatory compound that starts atherosclerosis, a condition in which fatty material collects along the walls of arteries.

How can you add more whole

grains to your diet? Start your day with a bowl of oatmeal or a whole-grain cereal. Have a whole-wheat bagel or a slice of rye toast.

At meals, enjoy a bowl of barley soup, wild rice salad or a slice of whole-wheat pizza. Choose tortillas made from whole cornmeal, whole-grain pastas and pilafs made with quinoa.

Snacks also offer an opportunity to add whole grains to your diet. Try oatmeal cookies, popcorn, whole-wheat pretzels, granola and pita bread made from whole grains.

Although cooking whole grains may take a few minutes more than refined grains, the nutty flavor they add to a meal will make the wait worth it.

Serving sizes of whole grains are the same as any food in the grain group: a slice of bread, ½ cup of cooked grains or pasta and 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal.

Kasik-Miller has been a registered dietitian for more than 25 years. She works at Sacred Heart Hospital as a clinical dietitian.