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Get the 'whole' grain

Wholegrains have all three of their edible parts intact, and are definitely more nutritious and healthier than refined grains.

YOU may have heard about wholegrains or wholemeal, but do you know anything about them?

Well, it may come as a surprise that all the refined grains that you find in the market actually start out as wholegrains.

Wholegrains are complete grains that include three components, namely, the bran, germ and endosperm.

However, with industrialisation and technological advancements, milling was introduced.

Milling removes the bran and germ components of wholegrains, resulting in the less nutrient-dense refined grains.

Refined grains, e.g. white rice, have a finer texture and extended shelf life. They are also easier to chew and digest.

However, the milling process also strips away important vitamins and minerals, and almost all of the fibre.

It is therefore amply clear that wholegrains are more nutritious compared to refined grains. They contain more dietary fibre, B vitamins, vitamin E, iron, zinc and other minerals, as well as unsaturated fatty acids and phytonutrients.

Wholegrains should be an essential part of a healthy diet as they provide you with numerous health benefits.

Dietary fibre is one of the star components of wholegrains, as it helps to lower the risk of many diet-related lifestyle diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

It also makes a positive difference in weight management as dietary fibre in wholegrains helps provide satiety, thus preventing over-eating and lowering your risk of obesity.

Dietary fibre in wholegrains also benefits digestive health by preventing constipation, as it provides

your stool with bulk and helps in frequent bowel movement.

Remember, wholegrain is not just meant for people who are unwell – it is meant for everybody, especially as it can help reduce the risk of diseases.

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines (MDG) recommends eating four to eight servings of grains and cereal foods a day, with preferably half the grains from wholegrains.

It is possible to achieve the goals of the MDG, and you will not have to sacrifice your taste buds for it either! In fact, wholegrains might just end up becoming your favourite food once you get used to them.

Now you know about the goodness of wholegrains. So, how can you incorporate them into your daily diet?

Wholegrains are wholesome

You can include more wholegrains in your diet by choosing unpolished (brown) rice, wholemeal bread, wholegrain cereals, oats, corn, whole wheat, wholegrain pasta, buckwheat, millet, rye, sorghum, etc.

There are two simple tips you can follow to get wholegrain foods in the market.

First, pay attention to the labels on food packaging and stay alert for words like "wholegrain", "wholemeal" and "whole".

Then, check the ingredients list to see if it contains wholegrains.

Choose only those that have wholegrains at the top of its list.

Take note that even making small changes to your diet will make a big difference, so every little bit of extra wholegrain counts. Just like any good habit, it should start from young.

If you have tried wholegrains and find the taste unpalatable, there are ways that you can adapt it to fit your taste buds:

- Mixing it with other foods – for instance, instead of using two cups of white rice for your family's meal, use a cup of white rice and a cup of brown rice.

Generally, white rice uses the 1-2-3 ratio – one cup of rice and two cups of water yield three cups of rice.

However, brown rice requires more water and may need a longer cooking time. It is recommended that beginners start by adding brown rice in small quantities and increasing the proportion gradually, e.g. for every 1½ cups of white rice, add ½ cup of brown rice. It is also recommended that you soak the wholegrain rice prior to cooking, otherwise, you may need to increase the amount of water used.

Lastly, do not forget to increase the amount of water used in direct proportion to the amount of brown rice you are using.

If you are unsure, you can always check the packaging of your brown rice for details of how much water to use.

You can also make your own delicious sandwich by replacing one slice of white bread with wholemeal bread.

For something different, use wholegrains such as corn or millet in soup, or oat mixed with rice.

Once you get used to the taste and texture, you can slowly increase your wholegrain consumption.

- Choose more wholegrain products when you go grocery shopping, e.g. wholemeal bread instead of white bread, wholemeal flour instead of refined flour for baking, wholegrain noodles or pasta instead of normal or refined types, wholegrain cereals/oats for breakfast, wholegrain biscuits/crackers.

- Try to keep at least two or three different types of wholegrain cereals on hand – this way, you won't get bored eating it after a few days.

- Include at least one type of wholegrain for each meal – start off your day with brown rice porridge or wholegrain cereals/oats with milk.

Other than brown rice, you can also opt for wholegrain pasta, wholegrain noodles or wholegrain mee hoon for lunch or dinner.

Wholegrain foods and products make good options for healthier snacking and can be easy to prepare, e.g. corn on the cob (grilled, steamed or boiled), popcorn (go easy on the sugar and fat with small amounts of butter, sugar or caramel), or homemade buns

(using wholemeal flour) with bean filling.

Just a part of the story

While eating more wholegrains is good for you, it is just one aspect of a healthy diet. Be sure to incorporate other healthy habits such as eating according to the principles of balance, moderation and variety (BMV).

This means that you should eat a balanced diet that contains foods from all five food groups in the Malaysian Food Pyramid; eat moderately (ie follow the recommended number of servings per day for each food group); and maintain a diet that consists of a variety of foods that meet your nutritional needs.

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