

Glorious Grains

If you think bread and rice are your only grain options, think again.

The most common grains around us are bread (wheat) and rice. Middle Eastern, and most Asian dishes are largely based on rice. Bread has also seeped into the culture from the west, and now our diet seems to revolve mainly around these two grains. Aren't you tired of these limited options?

There are loads of other grains out there that many people are not aware of. Grains are a great source of fibre, which helps prevent constipation and digestive problems, but they are also loaded with nutrients and flavour! They are also very versatile to use in different dishes and recipes.

Oats, for example, are a great source of complex carbohydrates. They are a very rich source of protein and B vitamins. They are also very filling and make a very nice porridge when mixed with milk; the ultimate comfort food! They can even be added to muesli, soups, and many desserts such as oat cookies and muffins.

Rye is another grain that is slowly gaining popularity. It is mainly used in making bread. Being low in gluten, it can make a very nice alternative to wheat. Rye bread doesn't rise as much as wheat bread and it comes as dense, closely packed slices that are very popular in Germany. Rye bread makes a nice breakfast option, topped with anything from jam and honey, to hummus or turkey.

Millet is a grain known as the 'king of cereals'. It has the most complete protein of all grains and it is free of gluten, which makes it great for digestion. It is high in fibre, easy to digest, and can be used as a natural antacid. Millet has high levels of iron, magnesium, and vitamin E, and it helps inhibit the growth of yeasts. It looks like couscous, cooks like rice, and tastes great with curry, in salads, or in soups. Try adding millet to parsley, cucumber, tomatoes, black olives, and spring onions to make a delicious millet salad, and drizzle it with lemon, olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Buckwheat is grain that is not technically a grain. It is considered a fruit, but looks and cooks like grains. It contains no gluten which makes it suitable for gluten-sensitive people, and it is an excellent source of protein and the bioflavonoid Rutin. Rutin is a natural substance that strengthens capillaries and helps treat varicose veins. Buckwheat is also high potassium, phosphorus, and B vitamins. It cooks like rice but the grains need to be lightly roasted in a dry pan for a few minutes before boiling. It can also be found as buckwheat flour or buckwheat noddles (popular in the Far East). My personal favourite is buckwheat mixed with spinach, onions, and mushrooms; or buckwheat pancakes for a sumptuous weekend breakfast!

Quinoa is a grain that has been around since the time of the Incas. It has been used in South America for many years but it is a newcomer to the rest of the world. Quinoa, pronounced Kin-wa, has the most complete protein which makes it very useful for vegetarians. It is also high in fibre and contains a broad spectrum of vitamins and minerals such as B vitamins, iron, and calcium. The grains need to be washed thoroughly before cooking because they contain natural

What is gluten?

Gluten is a protein found naturally in some grains such as wheat, barley, rye, and (to a lesser extent) oats. Gluten is allergenic and may cause a reaction in sensitive individuals. Symptoms of gluten sensitivity include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, depression, irritability and gastro-intestinal irregularities. A severe gluten sensitivity is also known as celiac disease, which is treated by the lifetime avoidance of gluten foods.

compounds that repel birds and insects; they must also be roasted lightly in a dry pan, and then cooked in water like rice. Quinoa makes a fantastic addition to soups, or it can also be purchased as quinoa flakes for porridge.

Spelt and Kamut are ancient wheat grains that have not been subjected to the heavy processing that wheat is subjected to these days. They are a lot less allergenic than wheat, and they contain a high source of protein and minerals such as magnesium and zinc. Rich in fibre, they make a great addition to the diet. They can be seen mostly as spelt and kamut pastas or flour.

So, on your next shopping trip, don't limit yourself to buying bread and rice when looking for carbohydrate options. Experiment with different grains that will each offer you a variety of benefits. Add them to soups, salads, main dishes, and even desserts. They can all be found either in health sections at some supermarkets, or in health food shops.

Tip

Try to avoid eating too much wheat. Wheat goes into making most breads, pastries, pizzas, pastas, noodles, food cooked in batter, cakes, muffins, biscuits, pancakes, waffles, and much more. It is cheap, convenient, and easily accessible.

Although these are all delicious options, today's wheat is selectively bred for commercial use and mass production. It is treated and sprayed, and contains high gluten levels. The gluten in today's wheat acts like a glue in the intestines, which prevents proper digestion and absorption of nutrients. It can worsen digestive problems such as bloating and constipation, and even cause wheat sensitivity symptoms if eaten regularly. Wheat sensitivity can cause headaches, water retention, weight gain, bloating, and dark circles under the eyes.

But before you panic, there are a lot of wheat alternatives that you can have instead of old-fashioned bread. Rice cakes, oatcakes, and popcorn make great snacks with topping; rye bread can replace regular bread; brown rice, oats, potatoes, or kamut pasta make a tasty carbohydrate meal; and different kinds of flour, such as oat, rice, and buckwheat flour, can be used to make desserts.

Alia Almoayed is a Nutritional Therapist running a busy nutrition consultancy in Bahrain, offering nutrition advice to the whole Middle East community. She writes health articles for various publications, holds lectures and seminars on health and nutrition, runs a weekly live radio health programme, and heads a number of weight loss projects. Alia is the author of *I Want Healthy Kids*, a book on how to raise healthy kids, and *The Dream Body Eating Plan*, a weight loss guide; she is also co-author of *101 Ways To Improve Your Health*. For more information, to book appointments, to get regular email health tips, or to request Alia's special FREE Report entitled: *5 Secrets Your Doctor Won't Tell You About Your Health*, visit www.AliaAlmoayed.com.