

Hot Topic:

WHOLE GRAINS & WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Excess weight greatly increases the risk for many chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

More than 60 per cent of Canadian men and 43 per cent of Canadian women have an increased risk of health problems because they are overweight.¹ The highest weight class, called obesity, has increased from six per cent of Canadians in 1985 to 18.3 per cent in 2011. It is predicted that obesity rates will continue to rise through to 2019.²

These trends are problematic because excess weight is linked to an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke and some types of cancer.^{3,4}

THE BEST WAY TO LOSE WEIGHT

Obesity is a complex disease with no one specific cause or precise solution. It's fair to say that no one food or ingredient is the sole cause of weight gain, nor will any specific food be the solution to permanent weight control. What's true, according to the World Health Organization, is that genetics, activity level, environment, diet and social-economic factors all influence weight.⁵

Over the years, nutritional research has focused on different diet patterns to see if one is better than others for weight loss success. In a recent meta-analysis of all diet types, 48 studies were examined and researchers noted that significant weight loss can be achieved with many different diet plans.⁶ One size does not fit all, and a dietitian can help determine what may work best for you.



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Interestingly, research shows that weight loss can be achieved by following a low carb diet⁷, but can also work if you follow a Mediterranean diet⁸ and vegetarian diet^{9,10} both of which contain carbohydrates including vegetables, fruit, whole grains and legumes. Data show that the best diet for you is one that you can stick to.

WHOLE GRAINS AND WEIGHT

Fibre has been linked to weight control, so researchers are investigating the links between high fibre foods, such as whole grains, and human weight control efforts. The findings largely indicate that people who consume three servings of whole grains as part of a balanced diet (one that also includes vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, lean protein and healthy fats), have a reduced risk for obesity and weight gain.¹²

Below is a sampling of some recent studies on grains and whole grains and weight control:

A paper reviewed 38 studies that specifically investigated the impact of bread on weight. The review concluded that diets containing whole grain bread were not associated with weight gain, rather that they may be beneficial to weight status and reduced abdominal fat. For diets including bread made from refined white flour, there are mixed results with epidemiological studies showing no impact on weight, while some intervention studies did show an increase in abdominal fat with excess refined bread.

Another study reviewed 15 previous papers that compared people who ate about three servings of whole grains daily to those who ate very few servings. The results: the subjects who ate more whole grains had a lower body mass index, smaller waists and a healthier waist-to-hip ratio.¹³

A comprehensive review of 66 studies showed an inverse link between whole grains and weight. It showed that those eating three to five daily servings of whole grains (at least half their grains as whole grains), compared to those who rarely consume whole grains, gained less weight over the 13 years of follow-up for the studies.¹⁴

WHY ARE WHOLE GRAINS BENEFICIAL?

The reason behind the impact on weight seen in the listed studies has not been clearly defined. However, some educated guesses have been made.

Whole grains have been reported to have a positive impact on satiety, the feeling of fullness or satisfaction after eating. This is often attributed to the high fibre content of whole grain, since those who eat more fibre feel full longer, delaying the return of hunger.¹⁵

Mastication, or chewing time, may also be a factor. Foods rich in fibre require more effort and time to chew, which extends both the eating and digestion period.

Other studies suggest that as whole grains are broken down in the body, they produce beneficial compounds (metabolites) that exert a positive effect not only on the gut, but other parts of the body as well.¹⁶ They can also affect the balance of gut bacteria, a factor that has been recently shown to be associated with body weight.

Additional theories suggest that the consumption of whole grains may be a common component of an overall healthy lifestyle. Some studies found that those who consumed whole grains were less likely to smoke and more likely to exercise.¹⁷

No matter the reason, research does indicate a positive role from whole grains in a healthy and balanced diet. Some wonderful whole grains to include in your diet are pot barley, oats, whole grain wheat, corn, quinoa and brown rice.



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