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Healthy News

Whole Grains 101

Ask a doctor or a dietitian about the value of good nutrition, and you're bound to get a lesson on the heart. Indeed, nutrition experts seem to be fixated on the organ.

Why does your diet matter so much to your heart? Mainly because your blood cholesterol matters. Your choices at the dinner table and the drive-through can help lower the amount of the cholesterol in your blood (and your risks of heart disease and stroke) or send that level soaring. Those food choices will also determine whether you get the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that can keep your heart and arteries strong and protect them from damage. One of the most important, and nutritious, food groups to keep your cholesterol in check: grains.



Make sure that fewer than 30 percent of your daily calories come from fat and that fewer than 7 percent come from saturated fat. If you take in 2,000 calories each day, that means you should draw the line at 67 grams of total fat; within that amount, you should limit saturated fat to 16 grams a day. This is the most important guideline, because nothing in your food, not even cholesterol, will raise the level of cholesterol in your bloodstream faster than saturated fat will. Some tips on identifying saturated fat: It is solid at room temperature, and the main dietary sources of it are animal products including beef, pork lard, poultry fat, butter, cream, and whole-milk dairy products. Some plant foods, such as coconut and palm oils, contain saturated fat, too. You can check food labels to see how much fat and saturated fat you're about to get, but those figures don't tell the whole story. Fat comes in different varieties, some much more dangerous than others. In addition to limiting saturated fat, you should avoid trans fatty acids, a type of fat often found in stick margarine, fast foods, and mass-produced packaged foods like crackers and cookies.

Brown Rice with Cranberries

PREP

35 mins

SERVINGS

4

SERVING SIZE

1/4 cup

Ingredients

1 cup short-grain brown rice

1/4 cup dried cranberries

1/4 tsp salt (optional)

Calories	178	Total Fat	6g
Cholesterol	22mg	Saturated Fat	1g
Sodium	94mg	Fiber	1g
Carbohydrates	27g	Protein	4g



- 1 Place rice in a small saucepan with 3 cups of water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to a simmer.
- 2 Cover and cook 25-30 minutes without stirring, until all the water has been absorbed.
- 3 Turn the heat off and add the cranberries and salt. Place the lid back on and rest off the heat for 4 minutes to allow the cranberries to plump.

Grains for Better Health

Eat at least six servings of grains a day, so that you get 25 to 30 grams of fiber daily. By selecting fiber-rich fruits and vegetables as well as whole grain breads and cereals, nuts, peas, and beans, you'll easily meet this important guideline. Soluble fiber, the kind found in oat bran, oatmeal, beans, peas, citrus fruits, and strawberries, can lower cholesterol. As a bonus, fiber may even cut down on how many calories you absorb from your meals. Many studies have shown that this adds up to powerful protection for the heart. The Nurses' Health Study at Harvard, a dietary investigation of more than 68,000 women, found that those who ate the most fiber each day were 23 percent less likely to develop heart disease than those who ate the least. In addition, a study recently published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that young adults who ate large amounts of fiber were less likely to develop obesity and diabetes, two conditions strongly linked to heart disease.

On Heart Disease

Extra weight can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes, all of which make heart disease much more likely. On average, overweight people develop heart disease about three years earlier than people of normal weight; extremely obese people tend to be about seven years ahead of schedule. Moreover, normal-weight adults with heart disease can expect to live to age 78, four years longer than obese patients. In endeavoring to control your weight, remember to combine your low-fat eating plan with regular exercise, which is another important measure for preventing heart disease.

Limiting Cholesterol

Cholesterol, found only in animal products, is most abundant in meat, organ meats, full-fat dairy products, and eggs. The American Heart Association notes that you will probably need to limit your consumption of whole eggs, since a single egg yolk contains about 200 mg of cholesterol. Egg whites, on the other hand, are an excellent source of protein and have no cholesterol or fat.