

MIND
1014
BODY

June Cheong

Cover Story

Wholegrain goodness

The HPB has raised the recommended daily serving of wholegrains from one to three after increasing evidence that eating it lowers the risk of developing chronic diseases like heart problems

Wholegrains are wholesome, but they are not ingrained in the local diet. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) hopes to change that.

Last month, the HPB revised its consumption guideline for wholegrains for adult Singaporeans.

It now recommends a daily intake of two to three servings of wholegrain foods or 50g of wholegrains, up from the one daily serving it previously recommended.

What is one serving of wholegrain?

If you consume half a bowl of cooked brown rice or two slices of wholemeal bread or two chapatis made from whole wheat flour, that would fit the bill.

So would half a bowl of cooked brown rice, beehoon or wholewheat spaghetti, four whole wheat biscuits or two-thirds of a bowl of uncooked oats.

The HPB's revised guideline follows from mounting evidence of the benefits of wholegrains, from comparisons with other developed countries' dietary recommendations and from findings in the 2004 National Nutrition Survey, which showed that our national diet is too high in refined carbohydrates.

The 2004 survey also found that

only one in 10 adult Singaporeans ate half a serving of wholegrain foods or more every day and that the average consumption of wholegrain foods was 0.2 servings a day.

Eating more wholegrains lowers the risk of developing chronic diseases like heart problems, diabetes and cancer such as abdominal and breast cancer, studies have shown.

"Wholegrains provide a lot of benefits for the heart. Dietary fibre from wholegrains helps to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease because fibre lowers blood cholesterol," said Mrs Ashu Datt, a dietitian at Sodexo Singapore.

Wholegrains also help to reduce and control weight issues, digestive disorders, prevent constipation, boost immunity and maintain bone health.

"Soluble fibre found in oats helps to reduce cholesterol and control blood sugar levels," said

Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

Ms Reutens said, "The potassium and magnesium found in wholegrains are heart healthy and help those who have hypertension control their blood pressure better."

Also, the vitamin E, selenium and phytic acid have antioxidant effects which may help to prevent damage to blood vessels.

While adults may choose to consume two or three servings of such grain products as part of their daily five to seven servings of rice and alternatives, teenagers should go for at least three servings, Ms Reutens said.

She explained: "It becomes a habit that will carry into adulthood."

When asked how consumers can

The average consumption of wholegrain foods among Singaporeans was

0.2 servings
a day in 2004



Wholegrain foods – such as (from top) wholewheat biscuits, brown rice, pop corn or wholegrain corn and mixed wholegrains – can reduce the risk of stroke, weight problems, digestive disorders and help prevent constipation.

ANATOMY OF A GRAIN

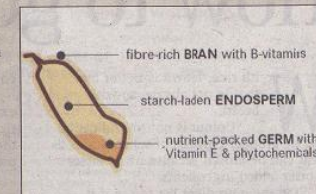
Wholegrains possess all three parts of the grain: the fibre-rich outer layer known as the bran; the central starchy part known as the endosperm; and the nutrient-packed inner area known as the germ.

The bran is rich in fibre, B vitamins and minerals like zinc, iron, magnesium and potassium.

The germ is packed with vitamin E, B vitamins, polyunsaturated fats, trace minerals and phytochemicals while the endosperm contains mainly carbohydrate and protein.

"When wholegrains are refined or undergo a milling process, the bran and germ are removed, reducing the grain's nutritional value.

"You can fortify it by adding vitamins and minerals but you can never put the fibre back," said



GRAPHIC: HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD

Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

Common wholegrain types are wholewheat, oatmeal, wholegrain barley, wholegrain corn (popcorn), brown rice, red rice, rye, buckwheat, bulgur, quinoa and millet.

When the label says wholemeal, this refers to wholegrains that have been milled to a finer texture but still have the three layers of bran, endosperm and germ intact.

ensure that the food they buy are wholegrain products or whole grains, dietitians Mind Your Body spoke to emphasised the importance of reading the ingredient lists and nutrition labels. (see next page)

Mrs Datt said: "Colour is not an indicator of wholegrain bread. Bread may be brown from colouring added.

"These are marketing strategies, so be careful. It's very important to be label-smart."

Ms Ng Kok Mun, a manager at the department of nutrition and dietetics at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, said: "In the ingredient list, the word 'whole' should appear before the word 'grain' and wholegrain should be listed first. "Consumers can also look out for HPB's healthier choice labels on the products."

The HPB has introduced a new "Higher in wholegrains" healthier choice logo and, to date, 70 food products are allowed to carry it.



To date, only 70 food products are allowed to carry the HPB's healthier choice logo (above).

Different food categories require different amounts of wholegrain to qualify for the logo. For example, brown rice or oats should contain 100 per cent wholegrains while bread and breakfast cereals need to carry at least 25 per cent.

Consumers should also take care not to be too hasty when it comes to overhauling their diet.

Mrs Datt said: "Any new food should be introduced slowly. If you start with too much too soon, you'll get

fed up or be put off.

"Use the 50-50 rule. First, replace 50 per cent of your refined carbohydrates with wholegrains. Your taste buds and body will slowly get used to it and you can switch to wholegrains entirely then."

junec@sph.com.sg

More stories on Page 14

ST PHOTOS: ASHLEIGH SIM