

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Whole Grain, Multi Grain or What Grain?

Food manufacturers look like they're really getting on the healthy food bandwagon if all the 'whole grain' this and 'multi grain' that appearing on store shelves are any good sign. But are they? You have to read the fine print to know for sure!

Baked goods, crackers and entrees made with whole grains really are better for us. The evidence from thousands of people in dozens of studies all agree on that. The more whole wheat, whole (brown) rice and other whole grains that we eat instead of white flour and white rice, the healthier we're likely to be. Whole grains are good for our digestive system. They help keep us 'regular', just like Grandma said. At least half our grains, or at least 3 or 4 servings a day, should be made from whole grains.

But whole grains also have many phytonutrients. Some of these are antioxidants to protect us from cancer or inflammation of the arteries. The oils in whole grains are less saturated. Some of them are better for our heart and arteries. The bran and germ that are taken out to make white flour and white rice also have minerals and vitamins. If we eat the whole grain we get the benefit of them too. So it makes sense to eat whole!

The problem is - how do we manage to do that? If you just look at front panels of food packages you might think that almost everything is whole grain now. Bread labels claim to be Wheat Berry Bread. Cereals claim "Now made with whole grains". Crackers are now Multi Grain Wholeness. It's easy to eat lots of whole grains, right?

Ahhh, but take a look at the ingredient list. If you are confused, you have every right to be. Is the first item on the list enriched flour? That's not a whole grain! Do you

have to read through several other ingredients before you get to the first mention of whole wheat flour? That's not a whole grain food! Are all those multi-grain ingredients way down on the list? If so, they're more decoration than true benefit.

What about the Whole Grain label, that little stamp on some foods? A "Good" stamp means that one serving of that food counts as *half* a serving of whole grain. An "Excellent" stamp means that one serving counts as one serving. A "100% Excellent" means that all the grain in that food is whole grain. Those stamps are accurate. You can decide to look for the stamp and only buy those foods.

However, there are many other foods that are also made of whole grains that do not have the stamp. To get the stamp a company must pay fees as well as prove that their foods meet the requirements. Many companies do not want to pay the fee even though their foods are whole grain. So, if you only buy foods with the stamp you will miss many other good, healthy foods.

The place to look on all product labels to tell if the food is whole grain, is on the ingredient list. Yes, I know, the print is tiny. And sometimes they seem to make the colors the worst possible for reading. Those little magnifying glasses with the light built in are perfect for playing Sherlock Holmes with a label. The *first flour or grain ingredient* on the list should say "whole" not "enriched.....".

Not all whole grain bread is dark. With the white wheat we now have whole wheat flour that looks almost white. Don't worry about the color, read the ingredient list for the honest truth about your food.

Here's a whole wheat treat that's quick to make and will make your kitchen smell wonderful too. Orange muffins can be dessert or breakfast, or a healthy snack for the kids just home from school. Enjoy!

Orange Muffins

½ cup coarsely grated orange rind (about 2 medium oranges)

1 cup whole wheat flour

1 cup all purpose flour

¾ cup sugar, divided

1 tsp baking powder

¼ cup water

½ tsp salt

¼ cup salad oil

¼ tsp baking soda

1 cup orange juice

1 egg, well beaten

Preheat oven to 425 ° F. Grease muffin pans or put papers in 16 muffin cups.

Combine ½ cup sugar, water and orange rind in saucepan. Cook slowly for 5 minutes, stirring often. Remove from heat, add oil, orange juice and egg. In large bowl mix flours, baking powder and soda, salt and ¼ cup of sugar. Add orange mixture, stir just until mixed. Batter will be lumpy. Fill muffin cups 2/3 full. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes.

Best if served hot. Serves 16.

Note: If desired, replace ¼ cup of sugar with Splenda for fewer calories.

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