Q. Recently I have seen a lot of products that are now whole grain, what makes them different and why are they so good for you?

A. Whole grain products are made with grains that are intact. Products that are not whole grain use processed flour with some nutritious parts of the grain removed. These products are then enriched, meaning some of the nutrients that were lost during processing are added back into them. Enriched products do not provide the same nutritional value as whole grain products. In addition to fiber, whole grains provide a variety of nutrients such as B vitamins, magnesium, iron, zinc, copper, plant sterols, and antioxidants. Whole grains have been linked to numerous health benefits such as helping to lower your cholesterol, reducing your risk for heart disease and certain cancers, managing your weight, and also keeping your digestive tract healthy. Get the benefits of whole grains by including at least 3 servings in your diet each day.

Q. I'd like to start eating more whole grains, how can I use them in everyday meals?

A. It can be easy to include whole grains in your everyday meals. Simply substitute whole grain versions in place of “white” versions like bread, rolls, pasta, and rice. You can also switch over to whole grain snacks such as whole grain crackers and pretzels, oatmeal granola bars, and even popcorn. There are also many other lesser-known whole grains that can be used as sides or in soups, pastas or salads like quinoa, amaranth, and bulgur. For some whole grain recipes visit http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org/recipes.

Q. Are quick cooking items like instant oatmeal and quick-cooking brown rice still considered whole grains and are they as healthy as their original version?

A. Even though these quick-cooking items are slightly more processed than their original versions, they are still made from and considered whole grains. The nutritional value of quick-cooking whole grains is about the same as their long-cooking counterparts, making them a convenient, healthy choice.

Q. I have a hard time getting my kids to eat whole grain foods, are there any kid-friendly products out there?

A. Many breakfast cereals that kids love are now whole grain. You can also try topping oatmeal with fresh fruit or honey to make it more appealing. Try thin-sliced 100% whole wheat bread which is less coarse than some other whole grain versions. If that doesn’t work, whole white wheat bread is now available and they won’t be able to tell the difference, especially when making peanut butter and jelly or grilled cheese. Whole-wheat pasta with marinara sauce is another healthy option for kids. Kids can also get whole grains in their snacks such as whole grain crackers or pretzels, granola bars, popcorn, or even rice puddings made with brown rice.
Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives. Since everyone’s health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your own doctor and registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you.
Q. Do you have any tips that will make it easy to get at least 3 servings of whole grains per day?

A. It can be easy to get 3 servings of whole grains every day. A serving of whole grain is a slice of bread, a ½ cup of whole grain pasta or rice, or 1 cup of whole grain cereal. Aim to get at least one serving of whole grains at each meal and you will easily be able to reach your goal. For example start your day with a bowl of whole grain cereal or oatmeal. For lunch have a sandwich on whole grain bread or whole grain pita and have brown rice to accompany your dinner.

Q. I am trying to lose weight, won’t eating a lot of carbohydrates like whole grain bread and pasta make me gain weight?

A. If you eat more calories than you burn you will gain weight no matter where the calories come from. Whole grains are a good source of fiber which has been shown to slow digestion and keep you feeling fuller longer. Including whole grains into your healthy diet may keep you from overeating and help you to manage your weight in the long run. Whole grains are also a healthy part of a balanced diet because they provide you with many health promoting nutrients. Talk to your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you.

Q. I have type 2 diabetes, should whole grains be a part of my diet?

A. Whole grains are an important part to everyone’s diet. In addition to health promoting nutrients, whole grains contain fiber which has been shown to slow digestion and prevent rapid rises in blood sugar which can be beneficial in helping people to manage their diabetes. Studies also show that whole grains can reduce risk for diabetes by preventing rapid rise in blood glucose and blood insulin levels. The fiber in whole grains has also been shown to help reduce risk for obesity and obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes. Talk to your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that’s right for you.