

Healthwatch

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OZFACT

Whole grains have up to 70 per cent more vitamins, minerals, nutrients and fibre than refined grains such as white flour.

Giving us a grain of hope

NOTICED the word “wholegrain” popping up lately on breakfast cereal and bread packaging, linked to lower risks of heart disease and diabetes?

You could be forgiven for thinking a new wonderfood had just hit supermarket shelves.

But wholegrains are the oldest thing since sliced bread — what’s new is all in the marketing.

Two months ago, without fanfare, Food Standards Australia New Zealand approved an application by cereal makers to change the definition of “wholegrain” on food labels.

Very few products qualified under the old definition of wholegrains — strictly unmilled cereal products such as brown rice.

Under the new definition, wholegrains include processed grains (dehulled, ground, milled, cracked or flaked) so long as the three original components — the outer bran layer, the inner germ and the endosperm — are recombined in their original proportions. The effect has been to hugely increase

Fay Burstin

the number of products that that can carry the wholegrain label — and satisfy the health-conscious but increasingly confused shopper.

Recent research reveals wholegrains have many health benefits, including:

REDUCING the risk of heart disease and stroke.

HELPING with weight loss (because fibre makes you feel full longer).

REDUCING the risk of diabetes.

IMPROVING bowel health and regularity.

LOWERING cholesterol and blood pressure.

PROTECTING against some cancers.

OFFERING benefits of a low glycemic index.

A recent poll found 47 per cent of consumers would switch breakfast cereals if they contained wholegrains but were unsure which products to buy.

“Wholegrain products are healthier because many of the components that protect against disease — vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants — are found in the bran

and the germ,” said Trish Griffiths, manager of Go-Grains, the public face of the Australian grains industry.

“The new definition makes it easier for people to identify wholegrain foods in the supermarket and hence get the health benefits.”

‘Now we know the germ is where we find most of the vitamins, antioxidants and minerals’

— CATHERINE SAXELBY

Since the change, food giants Sanitarium and Nestle have launched new products or relabelled old ones to win a bigger share of the \$895 million breakfast cereal industry.

And commercial bakeries are busily cooking up new labels for a bigger piece of pie in the \$942 million bread market.

FSANZ spokeswoman Lydia Buchtman said the new definition took two years of consultation.

“We felt there were public health benefits in making

whole grains more accessible and palatable, especially for children,” she said.

But not everyone was happy with the change.

Diabetes groups argued milled grains had a higher GI than intact grains and food technologists complained it would swallow up the old term “wholemeal,” which could mean wholegrains milled to a finer texture in varying combinations.

Leading nutritionist Catherine Saxelby, author of *Nutrition for Life* (Hardie Grant Publishing) said nutritional studies over the past five years had completely changed the way grains were viewed.

“In the past, wholemeal flour was just refined white flour with the bran put back in,” she said.

“Now it has to have all three parts of the grain added back.

“In the ’80s, bran or fibre was the only thing anyone really cared about, but now we know the germ is where we find most off the vitamins, antioxidants and minerals.”

Net link: www.gograins.grdc.com.au

WHAT'S IN A WHOLEGRAIN

