

# From the Nutritionist

Andrea Hart, RDN, CDN



## Following the Dietary Guidelines Part 2: Choose Whole Grains More Often

Food and nutrition trends come and go. At any given time, a number of drastically different diets are promoted as being the healthiest. Unfortunately, many of these trendy diet plans aren't backed up by science. While they might produce short term results like weight loss or muscle gain, they can be harmful in the long run, actually increasing the risk of chronic medical conditions like heart disease, kidney disease, or cancer. Diets that eliminate one or more food groups, like many of the popular high-protein/low-carbohydrate plans, fall into this category. Much research, on the other hand, does point to diets high in plant foods for numerous

health benefits, both short term and long term. These foods can help to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, improve digestion, and decrease the risk of chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are just one set of recommendations that include an emphasis on plant foods because of the health benefits these foods provide.

One category of plant foods is the grain group. Grains are a key source of carbohydrate, which is the main fuel of the body. Although any source of carbohydrate will provide the body with fuel, the best sources are also packed with nutrients. Carbohydrates from nutritious foods like whole grains provide the body with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients, which are all necessary for the body to perform at its best, and are also the key to the long term health benefits. Most adults should aim for 5-8 ounces of grains per day, and at least half of these should be whole grains. Follow these tips to choose whole grains more often:

- Choose whole grains instead of refined grains whenever possible – look for whole grain versions of bread, pasta, cereal, rolls, and other foods in supermarkets, restaurants, and in the dining halls.
- The healthiest grains are found in their intact forms or only slightly processed, like quinoa, oats, brown rice, and barley – you can find these throughout the dining halls in soups, prepared salads, hot entrees, and the breakfast oatmeal bar.
- Eating gluten free doesn't mean avoiding all grains – many are naturally free of gluten, including amaranth, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, and rice. These generally have more fiber and other nutrients than “gluten free” versions of pasta and bread.
- If you're new to eating whole grains, you may need time to adjust to the taste and texture – try them in the dining halls, where you can get small portions and supplement them with other foods you already like.
- Popcorn, a whole grain, can be a healthy snack if made with little or no added salt and butter. Also try 100% whole wheat crackers as part of a healthy snack.

*Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York State-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.*

*Contact Andrea: [andrea.hart@cortland.edu](mailto:andrea.hart@cortland.edu) or call 607-753-5773 with questions or to set up an appointment. Or stop by her office, first floor, Neubig Hall, across from the Neubig Dining cashier.*

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- Foods labeled as multi-grain, stone ground, cracked wheat, or “made with whole grains” may not be true whole grains. Also, color is not a good indication of a whole grain – bread can be brown because of added ingredients, like molasses. Check ingredient lists and choose foods that name one of the following whole grain ingredients first: brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, oatmeal, popcorn, quinoa, rolled oats, whole-grain barley, whole-grain corn, whole-grain sorghum, whole-grain triticale, whole oats, whole rye, whole wheat, or wild rice.

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