

Bring On the Bran: Study Shows Whole Grain is Better at All Ages

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It doesn't matter how old you are, whole grain bread is better for you than white bread.

A new study led by University of Maryland assistant professor Nadine Sahyoun, an expert in nutrition for older adults, shows, that among older adults, those who eat whole grains foods instead of refined grain products may be at lower risk of having health conditions that can lead to diabetes and heart disease. In addition, they have a lower mortality rate from cardiovascular disease than people who don't eat whole grain.

In a paper published in the January edition of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Sahyoun's team looked at how eating whole grain foods affects the metabolic syndrome of older adults. Metabolic syndrome is a condition characterized by disturbed glucose and insulin metabolism, central obesity and hypertension.

By looking at three-day food diaries of more than 500 people aged 60 and older, Sahyoun's group found those who consumed more whole grains were at significantly lower risk of having metabolic syndrome.

"There have been studies that show the benefits for a middle-aged population," said Sahyoun, assistant professor in Maryland's department of nutrition and food science. "Ours is the first study that shows the relationship between eating whole grains and the health benefits for older people, whose metabolic characteristics may be different from younger adults."

Three Servings Makes a Difference

Metabolic syndrome, which is linked to increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, is increasing in the United States. It's estimated that 40 percent of men and 51 percent of women over 60 are affected with metabolic syndrome.

In a group whose average age was 72 for men and 73 for women, the study found that subjects who daily consumed about three servings of whole grain, such as whole grain bread, cereal and brown rice, had a lower prevalence of metabolic syndrome than people who ate less than one serving a day.

Start Young

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends people consume three or more ounces or the equivalent of whole grain products a day.

"Whole-grain foods contain fiber, vitamins, minerals and other things that are removed during refining," said Sahyoun. "We recommend that whole grain intake should start from a very young age to develop a healthy lifestyle. Cardiovascular changes and diabetes risk are starting to occur earlier now, especially due to the obesity epidemic."

Source: University of Maryland

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