

Offer kids whole grains; they'll eat them, study shows

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A small child in Mumbai, with a shaved head, eating bread with her hand.
Credit: Wen-Yan King/Wikipedia

(Medical Xpress)—Many parents presume their children will shun whole

grains because they think they don't like them, a University of Florida researcher says, but a new UF study may start to debunk that idea.

If whole grains are offered, kids [eat](#) them, according to a new study by researchers at UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Specifically, former graduate student Allyson Radford and two faculty members found children ate whole- and refined-grain foods in equal amounts.

"We tried to choose foods we thought kids would enjoy, such as cereal bars, macaroni and cheese and SunChips and found that they ate the ready-to-eat snack foods the most," said Radford, one of the study's authors. "We were interested to see if they would eat the whole-grain foods as much as the refined-grain foods, and so we were pleasantly surprised that they would eat the same amount whether the [food](#) was whole or refined."

Radford co-wrote the paper with assistant professor Wendy Dahl and professor Bobbi Langkamp-Henken, all of whom are in the food science and human nutrition department. The study was published online last week by the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

Eating whole grains, combined with a healthy diet, may reduce the risk of heart disease and help with weight management, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Examples of whole-grain foods include popcorn, oats, whole wheat bread and brown rice. Refined grains, enriched and fortified with nutrients, include foods such as white rice and white bread.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans call for at least half the grain consumers eat to be whole grains, and they urge adolescents to consume 5 to 7 ounces of grains daily with at least half being whole

grains. National surveys suggest adolescents consume far less: about 1 ounce, or the grain contained in one slice of bread.

Federal dietary guidelines for the 2012-13 school year increased the whole grain required in school lunches. Starting this fall, schools must offer only whole-grain rich products.

The new rules requiring more whole grains in school lunches should result in adolescents eating more of them, Dahl said, but many parents believe their kids won't eat whole grains.

General Mills funded a broad study on the impact of whole grains on immunity. As part of the study, Radford wanted to know if children could meet the 2010 dietary guidelines for whole grains. For the study, 83 students in a Florida middle school were randomly assigned to receive either whole- or refined-grain foods over a six-week period in 2010. Of those, 42 students were in the refined grain group, while 41 were in the whole-grain group.

Participants and their families were given refined-grain or whole-grain pasta, rice, bread and other foods to eat at home. And they were given whole- and refined-grain snack foods to eat at school.

Researchers interviewed students weekly to see what fruits, vegetables and grains they ate in the previous 24 hours. Before the study, participants were eating about one ounce of whole grain per day. During the study, students in both groups reported eating more than 6 ounces of grains each day, and those given whole grains reported more than half their grain intake came from whole [grains](#), meeting the 2010 [dietary guidelines](#).

Snacks served at school were the most popular grain foods the kids ate.

"Encouraging consumption of whole-grain foods that require little to no preparation may be the most effective means of increasing whole grain intake at home," said Radford, now a UF research study coordinator in food science and human nutrition.

Provided by University of Florida

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