

Whole Grains, Demystified

Is there anything more inviting than the smell of baking bread? Freshly-baked bread spread with rich butter seems like one of the most wholesome things we could feed our families until we read about the problems associated with gluten, refined flours, or unsoaked grains. Perhaps, like I was, you're confused by all the conflicting messages you've heard about whole grains. Let me explain to you what I've learned from the nutritional research of the [Weston A. Price Foundation](#) and Sally Fallon's marvelous cookbook [Nourishing Traditions](#).

Let's first tackle the subject of gluten, a protein found in many grains. Wheat, rye, barley, and oats all contain gluten, wild rice, millet, and buckwheat do not. Gluten can be difficult for some people to digest, leading to annoyances like flatulence, bloating, and intestinal discomfort. More seriously, those with Celiac disease have a severe gluten allergy that causes intestinal tract damage and nutritional deficiencies.

If you've been following my blog for any length of time, you'll know that I often encourage my clients to [go gluten-free](#) for at least a period of time to see whether the absence of this protein in their diets leads to physical improvement. Plus I've collected so many [yummy gluten-free recipes](#)! However, this doesn't mean that I believe everyone needs to

completely avoid wheat or rye products. In fact, those with gluten sensitivities may actually be able to tolerate some gluten-containing grains with proper preparation. One to try is spelt, an ancient member of the wheat family that may be easier to digest than modern varieties. The great thing about spelt is that it can usually be substituted for whole-wheat flour in recipes with similar results.

Maybe you've heard about soaking or sprouting grains before cooking, but are confused about why the process is beneficial. All grains contain some amount of phytic acid, an antinutrient that blocks the absorption of minerals such as calcium and magnesium in the intestines. Soaking flour or grains for at least seven hours in acidified water or cultured milk products like buttermilk or yogurt allows the enzyme phytase to begin breaking down phytic acid, neutralizing this potentially harmful compound and actually increasing nutrient availability. You can think of soaking as a type of predigestion. In fact, because gluten is partially broken down during soaking, soaked grains are generally more digestible for those with gluten sensitivity. You'll find lots of great recipes using soaked grains in *Nourishing Traditions*.

Allow me to share one more delicious tip for making whole grains more digestible: eat your bread with a spread of raw honey. The pollen in raw honey contributes an enzyme called amylase (also found in saliva) that helps break down starch into sugar. In effect, you're initiating the digestion process before you even start eating. How's that for an easy -to-follow health suggestion?

Make it your goal to avoid commercial bread products, even those touted as healthy whole-grain options. They contain flours that have been stripped of their naturally-occurring vitamins and minerals then fortified with synthetic versions. If you love white bread, experiment with recipes using soaked whole wheat flour. The soaking process softens the wheat so much that it yields results very similar to refined white

flour. If your schedule is such that bread making isn't possible, look for artisan sourdough bread made with whole-grain flour. Fermenting also allows for the breakdown of phytic acid before consumption.

Then tear a piece of hearty bread and top it with a big chunk of cold raw butter. 'Nothing like it!