

Whole grains and unusual beans

Simple, nutritious, and tasty

Relieving the much described obesity epidemic is challenging enough in good economic times. And today, with the added pressures of tight dollars and the urge to eat for comfort, we seem to have two choices. Either we put a healthy diet on the back burner and resign ourselves to the pressures and stresses of finances, social, and business demands, or we choose to confront all challenges with physical health and well-being.

Too often parents and child care programs have relied on large servings of highly processed, quick-to-prepare foods. Cheese slices, nut butters, canned beans, and prepared pasta sauces are mainstays of many diets. In *Simple Food for Busy Families* (2009), this diet is described as the SAD (Standard American Diet) Lifestyle. Typically the SAD Lifestyle includes

- fast food, junk food, or processed food,

- screen entertainment (TV, videos, computer games) for several hours a day; and
- stress as a regular feature of daily life.

Absent in this lifestyle are high quality natural foods, exercise, and other healthy lifestyle practices like sleep and a consistent routine.

Obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are being diagnosed in children at alarming rates. Without intervention, today's children will likely have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Exploring the benefits of whole foods

Whole grains include wheat, corn, rice, oats, barley, and quinoa (pronounced KEEN wah) eaten in their whole or natural form. You are probably already preparing and serving some whole grains like popcorn and steel-cut oatmeal. And you're probably focusing more on the delicious taste than on the fact







that these foods are whole grains.

We know that fruits and vegetables contain disease-fighting chemicals called antioxidants, which help maintain cellular health. Whole grains are often an even better source of these key nutrients. Moreover, whole grains have some valuable antioxidants not found in fruits and vegetables, as well as B vitamins, vitamin E, magnesium, iron, and fiber.

Researchers have offered clear indication that whole grains reduce the risks of heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and obesity. People who eat whole grains have lower risk of obesity and lower cholesterol levels. Other benefits include reduced risk of asthma, healthier arteries, reduced risk of inflammatory disease, lower risk of colorectal cancer, healthier blood pressure levels, and less gum disease and tooth loss.

Like many whole grains, beans are an ancient food, among the first cultivated crops. Beans and

grains have a natural nutritious relationship. The amino acids of each complement the other to form a complete protein. Across the world, diverse cultures developed their own nutritious combinations, such as lentils and rice, beans and corn, and chickpeas and couscous.

Recent dietary studies show that beans help reduce cholesterol while providing great nutritional benefits including essential B vitamins, iron, calcium, and fiber. Further, they are low in fat. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (2006) has found that people who eat beans at least once a week have a reduced risk of heart disease and are 22 percent less likely to be obese than those who eat no beans.

Cooking dry beans from scratch is less expensive than serving canned beans. Plus you can control the amount of salt in each serving. They can be difficult to digest, however, because of large sugar molecules that aren't broken down and absorbed as easily

as other sugars. It's usually safe to introduce lentils and split peas to babies older than 12 months (with parent permission). But it's best to wait to introduce beans to older toddlers who have a better developed intestinal system.

Discovering new beans and grains

Whole grains, or foods made from them, contain all the essential parts and naturally occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed. Look for the following grains and beans in the bulk bins at your grocery store. Experiment with different combinations. Cooking methods are fairly standard—and simple enough for classroom cooking activities.

Whole grains	Beans
amaranth	black
barley	black-eyed peas
corn	cannelloni
buckwheat	great northern
oats	kidney
quinoa	lentils
brown rice	pinto
bulgur wheat	split peas
wild rice	lima
millet	red

Cooking times for grains can vary according to the age of the grain, the variety, and the pans you use. Typically you should add grain to boiling water and simmer gently. If all the water is absorbed before the grain is tender, add more water. If the grain cooks before all the water is absorbed, drain the excess. To cook grains more quickly, soak for a few hours before cooking.

Dried beans have a long shelf life but fresher beans cook more quickly and have better flavor. Avoid beans that are cracked,

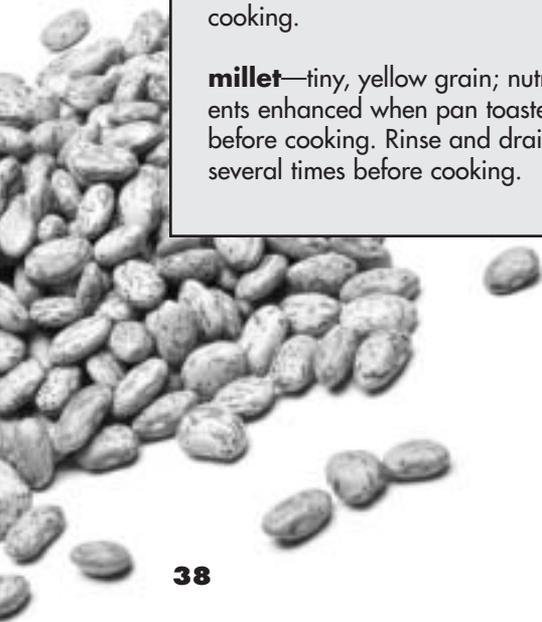
Learning portion control

Use these guidelines to help children learn to know when they are full.

- Move into mealtime smoothly. Invite children to settle down a bit before beginning to eat. Encourage children to take a deep breath, unfold a napkin, and greet the other children at the table. If children bring their lunches from home, encourage them to place their dishes on a placemat rather than eating out of the sack or lunchbox. Serve kitchen-prepared meals family style and help children learn to wait until everyone is served before beginning to eat.
- Encourage children to take time to smell their food before tasting. Notice colors and textures too.
- Help children learn to chew thoroughly. A good rule of thumb is to chew a bit of food 10 times before swallowing!
- Model and teach taking a break before bites. Slow the pace of the meal as much as possible. Eating slowly helps improve the digestive process by helping you know when you've eaten enough.
- Try to minimize interruptions during mealtime. Turn off the music and try to stay seated once the meal begins. Moving slowly will likely minimize spills and other table accidents.

Standard cooking instructions for grains

Grain	Ratio of grain to liquid	Cooking time	Yield
amaranth —kernels are tiny, has a peppery taste, and a higher level of protein than most other grains. Don't soak.	1 cup grain to 2 cups water or stock	20 – 25 minutes	3½ cups
barley —Scotch barley kernels are tough and cook in less time if soaked overnight to soften. Pearled barley is not as nutritious. Rinse before cooking.	1 cup grain to 4 cups soup stock or water	40 – 45 minutes	3½ cups
corn (meal/grits/polenta)—dried kernels, ground to various coarseness. Avoid labels that say degerminated if you want to buy whole grain.	1 cup grain to 4 cups water	35 – 45 minutes	2½ cups
buckwheat —pan toast groats or kernels to make kasha.	1 cup grain to 2 cups boiling water	20 minutes	4 cups
oats —steel cut oats are whole grain groats cut apart for easier cooking. Prepare in a slow cooker on low heat overnight.	1 cup oats to 4 cups water	30 – 35 minutes	4 cups
quinoa —lightly textured, crunchy grain with mild flavor. Highest amount of protein of grains. Rinse thoroughly before cooking.	1 cup grain to 2 cups boiling water or broth	15 minutes	3 cups
brown rice —the least refined rice; contains the most fiber.	1 cup rice to 2 cups water or broth	40 minutes	3 cups
bulgur —boiled, dried, and cracked wheat kernels. Quick cooking.	1 cup grain to 2½ cups water	10 minutes	2 cups
millet —tiny, yellow grain; nutrients enhanced when pan toasted before cooking. Rinse and drain several times before cooking.	1 cup grain to 2½ cups water	30 – 40 minutes	4 cups



chipped, or split. Sort beans to remove any small stones and rinse the beans thoroughly. Soak most beans overnight to shorten cooking time and remove some of the complex sugars that cause indigestion. Lentils, split peas, and black-eyed peas cook quickly and do not need to be soaked before cooking.

To cook, pour off the soaking water and cover the beans with fresh water and bring to a rolling boil. Skim off the scum that forms on the surface and gently simmer the beans until tender. Cooking time will vary according to the bean type. In general one cup of dried beans will yield about 4 cups cooked.

Most grains and beans freeze well after cooking, so cook big batches and freeze leftovers.

Cooking with children

A surefire way to help children discover new foods is to involve them in meal preparation. For some, getting buy-in will be a challenge, but few children can resist tasting what their friends are declaring “yummy.” Don’t force new foods, but faithfully offer them.

Modify the following recipes for classroom cooking activities. Remember to review the recipe, gather equipment and ingredients, and prepare step-by-step rebus charts before starting. Also see “Cooking with kids” in the fall 2000 issue of *Texas Child Care Quarterly* for background information on the benefits of classroom teaching activities.

Granola

- 1 cup steel cut oats
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds
- 1/2 cup nuts
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon oil
- 1/2 cup coconut
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup dried apricots
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries

Toss oats, seeds, and nuts together with oil and brown sugar. Spread on baking sheet and roast in 325 degree oven for 1 hour or until oats are browned. Turn off oven and add fruit. Leave in oven until cool. Store in a sealed jar or bag. Use as a topping on yogurt for snack or with breakfast.

Whole grain pilaf

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 cup mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- whole grain
- 2 cups stock

Sauté onions, carrots, and mushrooms in a little oil in a saucepan. Add crushed garlic and grain and cook briefly. Add broth (chicken, beef, or vegetable) and simmer until all of the liquid is absorbed.

Hummus or chickpea dip

- 2 cups cooked chickpeas
- juice from 1 lemon
- 1 garlic clove
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Precook the chickpeas. Use a blender to puree the chickpeas, lemon juice, and garlic. Add water to make a smooth paste.

Pour into serving bowl and sprinkle with olive oil. Serve with carrots, bell pepper sticks, or other vegetables.



Black beans



Lima beans



Bulgur wheat



Lentil and squash soup

- 1 large onion
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cups butternut squash, peeled
- 12 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup lentils
- seasonings such as cumin, bay leaf, or ginger powder, as desired
- 1/2 cup bulgur
- 1 cup orange juice

Chop onion and sauté in olive oil. Cube squash and add to onion. Add broth, juice, lentils, and any desired seasonings. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 15 minutes. Add bulgur, and cook for another 30 minutes.

Apple and grain salad

- 2 cups cooked wheat berries, barley, or quinoa
- 1 green apple
- 1 red apple
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- pinch of salt
- fresh or dried mint leaves

Prepare the grain and put in a serving bowl. Core and chop the apples (do not peel), and toss with the grain. Make the salad dressing by combining the oil, juice, and salt in a small bowl. Pour the dressing over the grain and apple mixture, and mix well. Sprinkle chopped mint leaves on top before serving.

Brown rice tabbouleh

- 3 cups cooked brown rice
- 3/4 cup chopped cucumber
- 3/4 cup chopped tomato
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- pinch of salt

Toss all ingredients together and chill well. Serve with hummus and whole wheat pita for a variation on the traditional Middle Eastern meal.

Quinoa and orange salad

- 1 cup cooked quinoa
- 1 small cucumber, diced
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon or orange juice
- pinch of salt

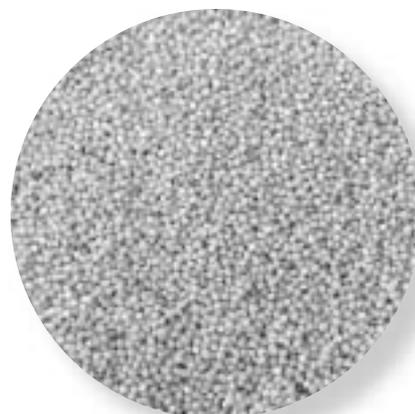
Remember to rinse the quinoa before cooking. Combine the cooked quinoa with the other ingredients. Serve this complete protein salad either warm or cold with cornbread or whole wheat tortillas.



Cannellini beans



Barley



Millet

Lentil minestrone with greens

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 14-ounce can tomatoes
- 1 pound lentils
- 2 quarts water or stock
- seasonings such as parsley, bay leaf, and thyme, as desired
- 1/2 pound Swiss chard or kale
- salt
- 1/2 cup elbow pasta (optional)

Sauté the onion and carrots in oil. Add the tomatoes with liquid to the sauté. Rinse the lentils and add to the vegetables with the water or stock. Add seasonings. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 30 minutes. Wash the greens thoroughly and chop. Add to soup with a pinch of salt. If desired, add elbow pasta and continue cooking until pasta is tender.

Breakfast grain—sweet or savory

All the grains mentioned above are excellent breakfast foods. Hot cereal is versatile, satisfying, and nutritious. Use a slow cooker to prepare grains the night before. Some sweet and savory combinations to try:

- corn grits or polenta with cheese
- steel cut oats cooked in apple cider with cinnamon
- any grain with dried or fresh fruit
- brown rice with chopped fresh vegetables and a few drops of soy sauce
- millet with cinnamon and butter
- amaranth with milk and berries

Resources

Bessinger, Jeannette and Tracee Yablon-Brenner. 2009. *Simple Food for Busy Families*. Berkeley: Celestial Arts Press.

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. April 2006. "Eat beans, weigh less." www.pcrm.org

Wells, Troth. 1993. *The World in Your Kitchen*. Freedom, Calif.: The Crossing Press.



Lentils



Buckwheat



Wild rice

