

## The Vital Role of Grains in the American Diet

Grains play an important role in the American diet, providing much-needed nutrients, such as folate, fiber and vitamin E. In today's crowded media landscape, between fad diets and the ever-growing gluten-free craze, it is easy for consumers to become confused about the role of grain foods in the diet. As a result, they may be making purchasing decisions that inadvertently deprive them (and their families) of the vital nutrients found in grain foods. Recent evidence highlights this confusion in today's food culture.

**1 in 5**

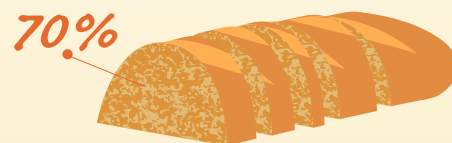
Americans try to include gluten-free foods in their diet.



Based on a July 2015 Gallup poll, **one in every five Americans tries to include gluten-free foods** in their diet.

(Source: Gallup)

However, we're also seeing encouraging news as consumers begin to understand the value of whole grains. According to the 2015 Food & Health Survey, **70 percent of Americans** are trying to eat more foods with whole grains. (Source: IFIC)



In an effort to help identify the vital role of grains in the American diet, the Grain Foods Foundation has assessed national consumer consumption data sets, also known as the National Health Examination Survey (NHANES), from 2005–2010 to evaluate the nutrient contribution of grains in the overall diet, clarifying how much these foods truly contribute to calories and carbohydrates, as a percentage of the overall diet. According to NHANES, the grain categories include breads, tortillas, cereals, pasta, and rice; however, it does not include prepared grain based mixed dishes nor snacks or sweets.

Many consumers may be surprised to learn that **grain foods account for just 15 percent of calories in an average American's diet**. This number is similar across all ethnicities: Whites - 14 percent, Hispanics - 14 percent, and African Americans - 15 percent.

GRAINS ARE THE LARGEST  
**SOURCE OF FIBER**  
IN THE  
DIET OF MOST AMERICANS



Despite this, grains remain the largest source of fiber in the American diet — an important consideration given nearly **95 percent of Americans fall short of the daily recommended fiber intake**. In other words, the vast majority of Americans would benefit from increased grain consumption.

## Grains are nutrient-dense foods that provide:

In addition to grain foods' contribution to fiber intakes, they are also nutrient dense foods filling in the dietary gaps of nutrients of concern as identified by US Dietary Guidelines.

### Fiber

A type of carbohydrate that adds bulk to the diet, helps with digestion and helps prevent constipation.<sup>1</sup>

### Vitamin E

Vitamin needed to support immune system and metabolic processes.<sup>2</sup>

### Potassium

Mineral that builds proteins, builds muscle, maintains body growth and controls heart activity.<sup>3</sup>

### Folate

B-vitamin needed to make DNA and other genetic material.<sup>4</sup>

### Iron

Mineral needed to carry blood oxygen to lungs and muscles.<sup>5</sup>

### Vitamin A

Vitamin needed to support the immune function, vision, reproduction, and cellular transmission.<sup>6</sup>

### Calcium

Mineral needed to support bone health and circulatory and hormonal activity.<sup>7</sup>

### Vitamin D

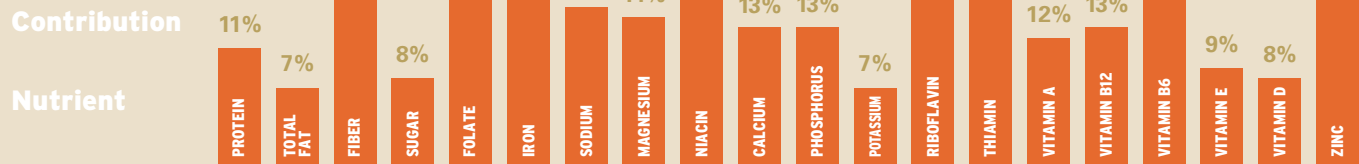
Vitamin needed to promote calcium absorption and integral for bone and cell growth.<sup>8</sup>

### Magnesium

Mineral that maintains nerve and muscle function, supports healthy immune system and bone health, and aids in blood pressure regulation.<sup>9</sup>

Grain foods are on par with milk and dairy foods in terms of nutrient density. Grain foods provide similar amounts of protein to milk and dairy foods (12 percent versus 13 percent); 13 percent calcium (compared to 30 percent milk and dairy); and similar amounts of riboflavin (one of the many B vitamins) at 17 percent for grain foods and 18 percent for milk and dairy.

## DAILY DIETARY NUTRIENT CONTRIBUTION FROM GRAINS



While Americans do not always correlate grain foods with a well-balanced and nutritious diet, research such as this reinforces the vital role of grain foods in overall health. As a nation, we focus heavily on carbohydrates and calories in making decisions about our food, without considering those factors as a percentage of a daily diet. Given a large majority of our nation is deficient in essential nutrients such as fiber, folate and iron, it is important to note that grain foods are rich in these nutrients and many others, without being as carbohydrate or calorie dense as many consumers seem to think. Despite numerous fad diets and a landslide of bad press for grain foods, the science-based literature still indicates that a healthy, balanced diet consistently incorporates grain foods. For additional information on grain foods or details about grain research, visit [www.grainfoodsfoundation.org](http://www.grainfoodsfoundation.org).

**Source info:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Data (NHANES). Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009–2012.

1. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dietaryfiber.html>

2. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vitamine.html>

3. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002413.htm>

4. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Folate-Consumer>

5. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-Consumer>

6. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminA-HealthProfessional>

7. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-Consumer>

8. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-HealthProfessional>

9. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002423.htm>

### Grain Foods Foundation

601 Pennsylvania Ave. NW // Suite 230 // Washington, DC 20004  
[www.grainfoodsfoundation.org](http://www.grainfoodsfoundation.org)

### Christine M. Cochran // Executive Director

Office: (202) 289-6119 // Mobile: (202) 491-6930  
[ccochran@grainsfoundation.org](mailto:ccochran@grainsfoundation.org)



@GrainFoods