

Whole Grains vs. Refined Grains: What Parents Need to Know

Bread, pasta, crackers, cereal. Grains are everywhere in kids' diets. But not all grains are created equal.

You may have heard the terms “**whole grains**” and “**refined grains**.” So, what's the difference – and which should your child be eating?

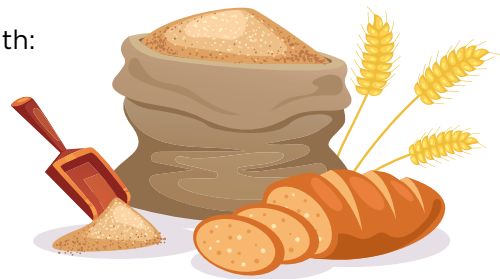
What Are Whole Grains?

Whole grains include **all parts of the grain**:

- The bran (fiber)
- The germ (nutrients)
- The endosperm (energy)

Because nothing is removed, whole grains are packed with:

- Fiber, which helps to prevent constipation
- Vitamins and minerals
- Long-lasting energy



Examples:

- Whole wheat bread
- Brown rice
- Oatmeal
- Quinoa
- Whole grain pasta

What Are Refined Grains?

Refined grains have been processed to remove the bran and germ. This gives them a **softer texture and longer shelf life**, but it also removes important nutrients.

Some refined grains are enriched (meaning certain vitamins are added back), but they still often lack:

- Fiber
- Natural nutrients

Examples:

- White bread
- White rice
- Regular pasta
- Many snack foods and baked goods

Why the Difference Matters

Whole grains help:	Refined grains:
Keep kids full longer	Break down more quickly
Support healthy digestion	Can lead to energy spikes and crashes
Provide steady energy (fewer sugar crashes)	May leave kids feeling hungry sooner

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Do Kids Need to Avoid Refined Grains?

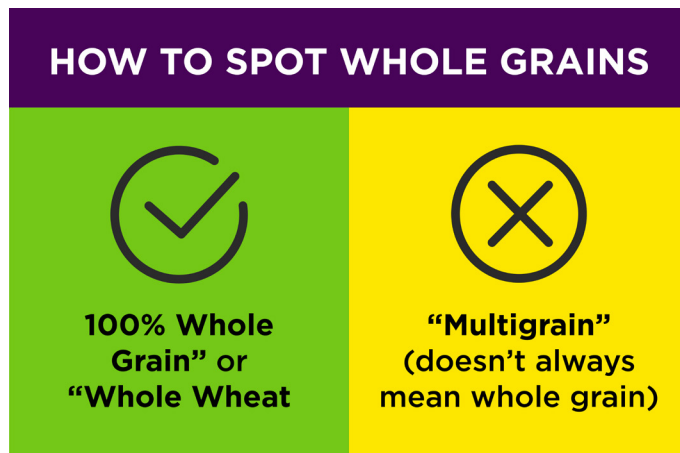
Not at all. This isn't about cutting foods out – it's about **finding balance**.

Aim to make **at least half of the grains your child eats whole grains**.

That means it's okay to:

- Have white pasta sometimes
- Enjoy a slice of white bread
- Eat favorite snacks

Just try to include whole grain options regularly.



Food labels can be tricky. "Multigrain" or "made with whole grains" doesn't always mean it's mostly whole grain. Look for:

Easy Swaps Families Can Try

- Brown rice instead of white rice
- Whole wheat bread for sandwiches
- Oatmeal instead of sugary cereal
- Whole grain crackers or pasta

Start small – kids adjust over time.

Whole grains give kids more of the nutrients they need to grow, stay energized, and feel full. You don't have to be perfect – just aim for **more whole grains, more often**.

And if you have questions about your child's nutrition, your UPMC CCP care team and registered dietitians are here to help.