



Gluten Alternatives: Grains

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Buckwheat is not a wheat at all. It is the seed of a fruit that is related to rhubarb. Eating buckwheat is linked to a decrease in LDL (low density lipids) cholesterol and an increase in beneficial HDLs (high density lipids). The nutrients in buckwheat, combined with its high fiber content, satisfy hunger cravings and help balance blood sugar. Buckwheat is rich in antioxidants and bioflavonoids like rutin. Per serving it has 80-90 milligrams of magnesium, a mineral responsible for relaxing muscles and blood vessels. Magnesium also plays a role in lowering blood pressure. Buckwheat is an excellent source of amino acids, including those rich in sulfur, as well as tryptophan, the building block for the relaxing neurotransmitter, serotonin. Buckwheat is very alkaline and is one of the three most “calming” grains you can eat.

Quinoa (keen-wha) was revered by the Incas of South America as a sacred food. It too is not really a grain but the seed of the goosefoot plant. Quinoa has a rich array of amino acids and is a superior source of protein. It has all the essential amino acids (those that must be eaten as they cannot be made by the body) needed to build new cells and tissues. It is also high in vitamin E, B vitamins and iron. It is easy to digest and very alkaline, which is calming to the mind and body. In my view, it is the perfect substitute for gluten-containing grains.

Millet is the third of my favorite alkaline grains that soothe and nourish cells throughout the body. In ancient times it was considered to be the “warming food”, protecting the body from the cold elements. It is almost a perfectly balanced plant protein and is high in B vitamins, iron, magnesium, potassium and vitamin E. It is probably one of the least allergenic grains you can eat.

Amaranth is not really a true grain. It was domesticated in Mexico but is found in many parts of the world as a wild or hybrid plant. It is an herb, related to the weed lambsquarter. It is very easy to digest, consisting of a whopping 12% protein. It has 5 times the amount of iron found in wheat. It also contains more calcium than does milk. It is one of the grains that I use when I have a stomach virus because it is nutritious and very easy on the digestive tract.

Black Rice and black rice bran are inexpensive ways to get health-promoting anthocyanin antioxidants. These antioxidants are found in blueberries and blackberries. Black rice is also high in fiber and vitamin E and is key in preventing both cancer and heart disease.

Whole grain brown rice is the most widely grown rice worldwide, supplying nearly half the daily calories for 50% of the world's population. The bran of brown rice contains high levels of gamma-oryzanol, one of two vitamin E compounds, the other being gamma-tocotrienol that are also powerful antioxidants. They fight heart disease by lowering blood levels of LDL. Brown rice is high in manganese, selenium, magnesium, phosphorous, trace minerals and tryptophan. It is also very high in fiber, which is important in preventing the buildup of toxins in the gut by decreasing transit time. Selenium and fiber also reduce colon cancer risk. Brown rice is high in plant lignans, which are converted to enterolactone, a phytonutrient important in the prevention of breast cancer and heart disease.

Brown vs. white rice: Whole grain brown rice has only the outermost hull removed. If brown rice is further milled to remove the bran and most of the germ layer, the rice becomes whiter in color while losing most of the beneficial nutrients that prevent disease. Further processing by polishing the grains removes the essential fat layer of the rice, resulting in a further loss of nutrients. This is the “quicker cooking” white rice we get in most restaurants. It is nothing more than a simple refined starch with a relatively high glycemic index (a measure of how quickly it turns to sugar when digested) devoid of its health benefits. White rice destroys approximately 70% of vitamin B3, 80% of vitamin B1 and 90% of B6. It has none of the essential fatty acids or fiber needed to prevent disease. White rice consumption has been linked to diabetes in populations that consume 1-4 servings per day. Even when nutrients are chemically reintroduced using an enrichment process, a dozen or more nutrients can never be replaced in this grain.

Oats that are certified as gluten-free, thereby eliminating the possibility of cross-contamination in mills that also process wheat, are extremely beneficial for reducing blood sugar, insulin levels and cholesterol. Oats are rich in soluble fiber and contain long chain sugars called beta-glucans within the whole-grain matrix. These beta-glucans do not break down in the intestines and help to balance insulin by preventing a spike in blood sugar.

Other grains such as **chia** act as a high-energy food source. Chia provides a balanced source of nutrition and is rich in protein. The Aztecs used it for endurance during war.