

White vs. wheat bread? Neither

BY DR. PHIL WAGNER
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There is a peace of mind that comes with feeling like you are treating your own body well. SPARTA athletes are no exception. "I'm doing the right thing, right?" is the common follow-up to most questions. Most athletes think they are doing the right thing by eating whole wheat (or whole grain) instead of white bread.

By now, many people understand the process that takes place in their body when they ingest sugars — and all grains, whether whole or refined, are digested as sugar. Your blood sugar spikes so your body releases insulin, to tell your muscles to take that sugar out of your blood. Doing this chronically results in insulin resistance (a precursor to type 2 diabetes). In addition, excess sugars are stored as fat. For these reasons, high sugar diets are considered by all health care professionals to be generally bad for your health.

So is there really a difference between white and wheat bread?

Researchers at the Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences, at the University of Guelph in Ontario compared the insulin response of four different breads (white, whole wheat, sourdough, whole wheat barley). They found no significant difference in insulin response between the four breads. Meaning, your body can't tell the difference in the sugar it gets from whole wheat, as compared to white bread.

Researchers at the Diabetes clinic at the Goztepe Training and Research Hospital in Turkey studied the blood glucose levels of 120 (type 2) diabetes patients after consuming three types of bread (whole wheat, wheat bran and rye). Compared to white bread, the patients blood glucose (sugar) levels rose the same amount.

But whole grain has more fiber, and fiber is good, right? Yes, fiber is great for you. It helps control the uptake of sugar and can help prevent

many diseases related to the gastrointestinal tract. Average Americans only get 15 of the 25-35 grams of recommended daily fiber. But does whole grain bread really have that much fiber? Compared to fruits and non-starchy vegetable, the answer is no. In a 1,000-calorie serving, whole grain cereal has 24 grams of fiber. Compare that to the 41 grams of fiber from the same size serving of fruit, and the 185 grams you would get from non-starchy vegetables. Clearly, whole grains are not the fiber giant that we think they are.

Lastly, all of your food reports to your kidneys as an acid or base after digestion. If your diet produces a net metabolic acidosis (more acid than base), your kidneys must buffer this acid to keep you at a neutral level. This process involves essentially stripping parts of your muscles or bones to get you back to neutral. Either way, this necessary biological process can hurt your athletic performance. All grains are net acid producing. The only foods that research shows to be net base producing are fresh fruits and vegetables.

So the next time you think you are doing yourself a favor by getting your sandwich on whole wheat, think again. Go for the salad with protein (chicken, fish or lean beef) on top. It has all the same ingredients as the sandwich, minus the grains, plus some very healthy vegetables.

Dr. Wagner is the Director of SPARTA Performance Science in Menlo Park. To learn more, visit www.SpartaScience.com or join the discussion at SpartaScience.blogspot.com.

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