



## FOOD & FUN AFTERSCHOOL, SECOND EDITION PARENT COMMUNICATIONS

# UNIT 5: WHOLE GRAINS

### ABOUT PARENT ENGAGEMENT

At the Y, we understand that making a difference in children’s health means involving families. Engaging with families in afterschool time is associated with increased family involvement in children’s education and school, improved relationships between parents and children, and improved implementation and outcomes for afterschool programs\*.

This tool contains parent engagement activities, a newsletter article, and an email message for you to use with Food & Fun unit 5. These tools are intended to help you connect with and educate parents and caregivers on the key messages in Food & Fun. (You can find all the Food & Fun resources on [Exchange](#).)

It is important to engage parents and caregivers on a regular basis in a variety of ways. Here are some ways that programs have engaged families at afterschool:

- Have a conversation with parents and caregivers at pickup
- Create a bulletin board with the key messages from each Food & Fun unit
- Involve parents and caregivers in daily physical activities and snack time
- Hold regularly scheduled events each month, like a family night

*\*Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School.* A joint publication of United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Harvard Family Research Project, and Build the Out-Of-School Time Network.

### PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Experiment and be creative—come up with your own ideas or modify the activities below to engage parents and caregivers at your afterschool program!

- **Healthy cereal taste test.** Invite parents and caregivers to participate in a healthy cereal taste test. Look for whole-grain cereals with 5 grams or less of sugar and more than 3 grams of fiber. Show adults and kids that cereals can be healthy *and* taste good!
- **Hold a whole-wheat pancake breakfast!** If you serve kids before school, invite families to a whole-wheat pancake breakfast. Alternatively, have an upside down day with breakfast for dinner!) Try out the recipe in the Food & Fun Recipe Packet. Make extra copies of the recipes to give out to families so they can make them at home!
- **Whole-grain options are available for the same price as refined grains!** Display a few examples of whole-grains foods that can be purchased for the same price as refined

grain options. Include the price tag in the display! For example, whole-wheat crackers, whole-wheat bread or pita, and/or whole-wheat tortillas. Shop around and see what other whole-grain options you can find at a low price!

Newsletter Article

*Use this article in your organization's publications. Be sure to include the credit "Provided by Harvard School of Public Health Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity and YMCA of the USA."*

## GET THE WHOLE STORY ON WHOLE GRAINS

What are whole grains? Examples are whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, whole oats, brown rice, cornmeal, and cracked (bulgur) wheat.

This month your child will explore the world of whole grains through arts and crafts, taste testing, and other activities.

### **The key messages for adults are:**

- Whole-grain breads and cereals help you feel full longer, and are packed with fiber and other nutrients.
- Refined grains (white bread, muffins, pasta, and white rice) aren't as nutritious as whole grains (whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, and brown rice).
- Serve whole-grain breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and no more than 5 grams of sugar per serving whenever possible.

### **The key messages for kids are:**

- Whole grains are important because they help you feel full longer and make your body healthy.
- Eat whole grains (like whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, whole-wheat crackers, and brown rice) instead of refined grains (like white bread, muffins, pasta, and white rice) whenever possible.
- Breakfast is a great time to try whole grains. Try whole-grain cereals, waffles, bread, or bagels.

Whole grains contain fiber, vitamin E, and healthy fats. Whole grains help keep your blood sugar under control, arteries clear, and they also make you feel full longer. Eating a diet rich in whole grains can lower your risk for heart disease and diabetes. While these diseases are mostly seen in adults, they are becoming more common in children too. Refined grains (like white bread, white rice, and pasta) do not have the nutrients or health benefits of whole grains. Eat whole-grain products instead of refined ones whenever possible!

When shopping for grains for your family, purchase foods made from whole grains. There are many whole-grain options available for the same price as refined options, like whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pitas, whole-grain crackers, whole-grain cereals, and whole-wheat tortillas. Select whole-grain foods by looking for key words on the food labels and ingredient list. Here's how you do it:

- **Read the nutrition label.** Choose 100% whole-grain or whole-wheat breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and no more than 5 grams of sugar per serving.
- **Read the ingredient list.** Choose breads and cereals that list a whole grain first. Examples are whole wheat, barley, oats, rye, brown rice, whole cornmeal, and millet.
- **Watch out for misleading terms.** Foods that are "multigrain," "100% wheat," "made with whole grains," and "seven grain," often are *not* made with mostly whole grains. Check the ingredient list to make sure that a whole grain is listed first!
- **Watch out for added sugar.** There is a lot of sugar hiding in breakfast cereals, flavored yogurt, cookies, breakfast bars, and other packaged foods. Choose foods and drinks without sugar as one of the first three ingredients. Remember sugar comes in different forms: corn syrup, dextrose, fructose... they are all just sugar!

## EMAIL MESSAGE

*Use this sample message to communicate with parents and caregivers by email.*

**SUBJECT: Healthy Habits Power Tips: Go for Whole Grains**

Dear (*insert program*) Parents and Caregivers:

This month your children will explore the world of whole grains through arts and crafts, taste testing, and other activities.

### **The key messages for adults are:**

- Whole-grain breads and cereals are filling and are packed with fiber and other nutrients.
- Refined grains (white bread, muffins, pasta, and white rice) aren't as nutritious as whole grains (whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, and brown rice).
- Serve whole-grain breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and no more than 5 grams of sugar per serving whenever possible.

### **The key messages for kids are:**

- Whole grains are important because they help fill you up and make your body healthy.
- Eat whole grains (like whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, whole-wheat crackers, and brown rice) instead of refined grains (like white bread, muffins, pasta, and white rice) whenever possible.

- Breakfast is a great time to try whole grains. Try whole-grain cereals, waffles, bread, or bagels.

Whole-grain breads and cereals are packed with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and flavor. They keep you feeling full longer, and can lower your risk for heart disease and diabetes.

You can help your family enjoy whole grains by following these **Healthy Habits Power Tips**:

- **Read the nutrition label.** Choose 100% whole-grain or whole-wheat breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and no more than 5 grams of sugar per serving.
- **Read the ingredient list.** Choose breads and cereals that list a whole grain first. Examples are whole wheat, oats, brown rice, rye, barley, whole cornmeal, and millet.
- **Watch out for misleading terms.** Foods that are “multigrain,” “100% wheat,” “made with whole grains,” and “seven grain,” often are *not* made with mostly whole grains. Check the ingredient list to make sure that a whole grain is listed first!
- **Watch out for hidden added sugar.** There is lots of sugar hiding in “healthy” packaged foods like breakfast cereals, flavored yogurt, and breakfast bars. Choose foods and drinks without sugar as one of the first three ingredients. Sugar comes in different forms: corn syrup, dextrose, fructose... they are all just sugar!
- **Be a good role model.** Serve whole grains with meals and snacks.

Check out the following links for information on whole grains.

- Harvard School of Public Health: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/carbohydrates/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/carbohydrates/)
- Nemours Foundation: [http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_fit/nutrition/sugar.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/nutrition/sugar.html)
- USDA: [www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/grains.html](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/grains.html)

To learn more about healthy lifestyles for families, visit [www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home](http://www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home).