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ULTIMATE VEGGIE
FRIED RICE and
CUCUMBER SALAD
WITH BLACK SESAME
& GINGER, p. 60

How
healthy is
your bread?
A shopper's
checklist



- Irresistible vegan **doughnuts**
- **Light & luscious** lunch wraps
- No-fuss **Greek feast**

September 2009



how to buy healthy bread

Not all loaves are created equal. Here's what you need to know

Kate Hahn loves bread

so much that on occasion her boyfriend has kept quiet after buying a loaf just to be sure there would be enough for lunch the next day. It's a lifelong fondness for Hahn, who grew up baking homemade bread. Now in her 30s and navigating the busy life of a writer in Los Angeles, she's content to buy it. Whether she brings home rustic rolls or her favorite loaf of sourdough, one thing is certain: "It will be eaten," she says, laughing. "If there is good bread in the house, it's usually gone that night."

Like Hahn, many of us opt for the convenience of store-bought bread, though it's not always easy to pick the right loaf. Ingredients lists are filled with baffling terms such as "unbleached wheat flour," and bread packages bear a range of health claims, including "heart healthy," "for digestive health," and "double fiber."

"Bread labels can be so confusing," says Bonnie Liebman, director of nutrition at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "It can make you feel like throwing up your hands."

But with a little label know-how, anyone can crack the code and buy healthful bread. To determine the truly good from the just good sounding, follow this advice from the experts.



PHOTOGRAPHY Mike Lorrig STYLING Andrea Kraus

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Choose 100 percent whole grain.

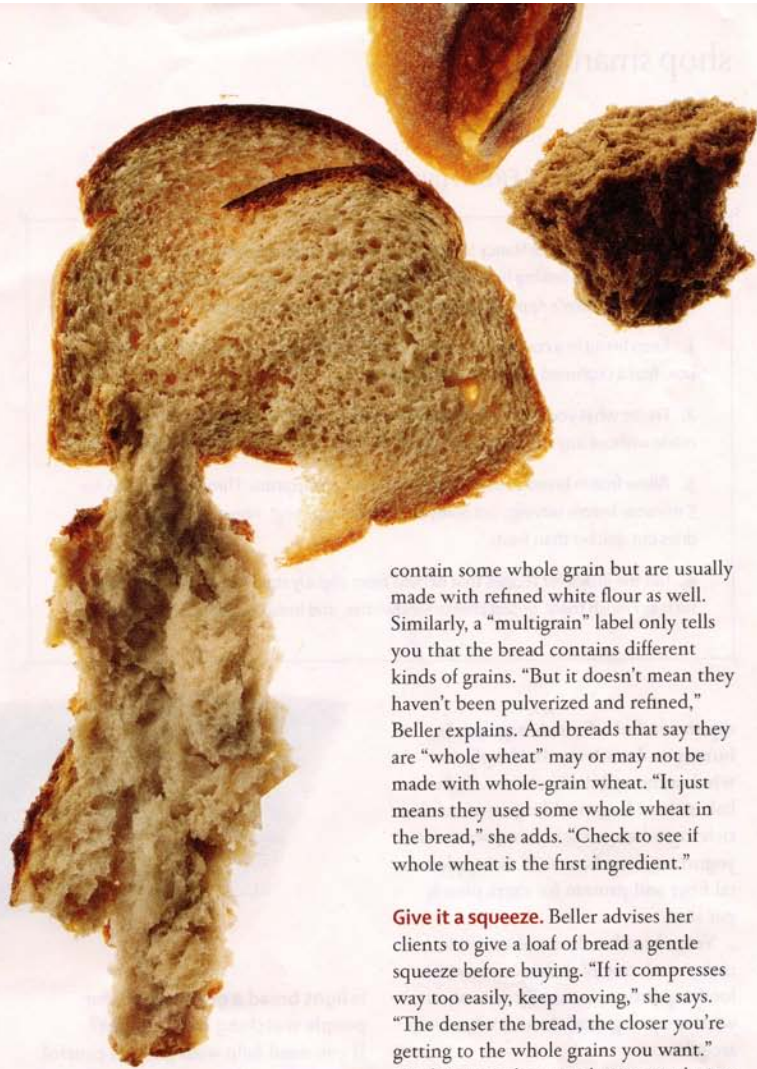
An intact kernel of wheat is made up of three parts: an outer coat of bran, an inner layer of germ, and starchy endosperm in between. When wheat is refined to make white flour, the bran and germ are stripped away, along with the lion's share of the grain's fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients.

"The simplest rule of thumb is to look for whole-grain bread," says Liebman. "Studies find that consuming more whole grains may lower your risk of heart disease and diabetes and may help prevent obesity. Look at the ingredients list to see if the bread is made with all whole grains, like whole wheat, whole rye, or whole oatmeal."

Believe what you see. Rachel Beller, MS, RD, founder of Beller Nutritional Institute in Beverly Hills, Calif., tells her patients to trust their eyes when choosing bread: "Check to see that you can spot actual grains or pieces of grain—and not just on top. They make your body work harder to digest and prevent blood sugar from spiking." Vegetarian and vegan nutritionist Dina Aronson, MS, RD, agrees: "Even whole-grain bread made from whole-grain flour is not as healthful as intact whole grains," she says.

Know how to spot refined white flour in disguise. "Wheat flour is just a code name for white flour," says Peter Reinhart, Johnson & Wales baking instructor, founder of Brother Juniper's Bakery, and author of *The Bread Baker's Apprentice*. For that matter, so is unbleached flour and enriched wheat flour. Any time you see "enriched," you know that you're getting white flour incognito. Flour that has been refined (stripped of its bran and germ) has some B vitamins and iron replaced via chemical enrichment, leaving the newly refined flour deficient in other important vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals.

Watch out for partial promises. Breads that are "made with whole grains"



contain some whole grain but are usually made with refined white flour as well. Similarly, a "multigrain" label only tells you that the bread contains different kinds of grains. "But it doesn't mean they haven't been pulverized and refined," Beller explains. And breads that say they are "whole wheat" may or may not be made with whole-grain wheat. "It just means they used some whole wheat in the bread," she adds. "Check to see if whole wheat is the first ingredient."

Give it a squeeze. Beller advises her clients to give a loaf of bread a gentle squeeze before buying. "If it compresses way too easily, keep moving," she says. "The denser the bread, the closer you're getting to the whole grains you want." Truth is manufacturers have a tough time making nourishing bread that's also soft and fluffy. "So sometimes they rely on chemicals," Aronson says, "which you also don't want."

BREAD FAQs

To Reinhart, bread is more than a mixture of flour, water, yeast, and salt. "It's such a simple, humble food and yet the flavors immediately satisfy us on deeper levels of our existence," he says. This may explain why taste trumps health for many bread shoppers, including Hahn. "It has to taste good," she says. "I can't feel like I'm duty-bound to just my health."

While there will always be a place for white bread—Aronson loves to

SHOPPER'S CHECKLIST

Rachel Beller, MS, RD, founder of Beverly Hills, Calif.-based Beller Nutritional Institute, breaks down the ideal nutritional content in a slice of bread:

- Calories:** 80
- Fiber:** 3 to 5 grams
- Protein:** 4 grams
- Carbohydrates:** 15 grams
- Sodium:** 125 milligrams
- Sugar:** 3 grams or less; listed after 5th ingredient

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3 WAYS TO KEEP IT FRESH (and how to use what's not)

We asked bread gurus Nancy Silverton, creator of La Brea Bakery, and Peter Reinhart, Johnson & Wales baking instructor, founder of Brother Juniper's Bakery, and author of *The Bread Baker's Apprentice*, the best way to stave off staleness.

1. Keep bread in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight. If you don't have a bread box, find a cupboard or a nook in the pantry.
2. Freeze what you won't eat within two to three days. French or Italian breads made without any oils have a very short shelf life, so consider freezing them earlier.
3. Allow frozen bread to thaw slowly at room temperature. Throw in the oven for 5 minutes before serving. Get ready to eat what you heat, however. Frozen bread dries out quicker than fresh.
4. Get the knack for recipes that benefit from slightly stale (four-day-old) bread, such as French toast, grilled cheese sandwiches, and bread pudding.

dip the end of a French baguette in hummus—breads can be deeply wholesome and delicious too. In fact, bakers have begun adding nutrient-rich ingredients, such as berries, nuts, yogurt, and seeds, as well as supplemental fiber and protein for extra punch per slice.

Yet as bread makers continue to tinker with one of America's favorite foods, questions naturally arise about what are just gimmicks and what truly are gifts.

Where does the double fiber come from? Breads with double fiber usually have about 6 grams per slice, which comes from adding fiber-rich bran (½ cup contains 12 grams of fiber and 5 grams of protein) or fibers from soy, oats, cellulose, or inulin, a prebiotic that helps spur the growth of good bacteria in your gut. While isolated fibers may do some good with irregularity or constipation, there's no proof yet that they lower your risk of heart disease and diabetes. "Whole-grain fiber in the whole grain seems to benefit us more than when we get it as a supplement," explains Reinhart. "Whole foods are better than reconstructed foods."



Is light bread a good option for people watching their weight?

If you need help with portion control, it might be. Light breads deliver about 50 calories per slice, but each slice weighs about 0.75 ounce, which is about half that of most regular slices. Aronson suggests another trick for managing your portions: freeze a favorite sliced bread (if you buy at the bakery, ask them to slice it) and remove two to three slices at a time. "It certainly is possible—easy even—to overdo bread," she says.

Should I opt for breads with the fewest ingredients?

Not necessarily. "Bread doesn't have to be a slab of flour, salt, and yeast," Aronson says. "It's an opportunity to incorporate things we know are good for us, like seeds, nuts, dried fruits, and whole

grains. Adding a whole food, like flaxseeds, which add flavor, complexity, texture, and nutrition, is fantastic."

Do sprouted breads have special benefits?

"When grains are sprouted," Reinhart explains, "starches and proteins are converted into smaller molecules that are easier to digest." That means sprouted breads offer more essential amino acids, minerals, and B vitamins than standard whole-grain varieties. Aronson adds that the amount of usable iron is higher in sprouted breads, thanks to phytase, an enzyme activated during the sprouting process that breaks down a powerful iron blocker found in intact grains. "Ounce for ounce, sprouts are the

most nutritious of all foods," Reinhart says. "A sprouted grain has become, in effect, a vegetable."

Bakery bread or store-bought?

"If the two loaves are identical nutritionally," Reinhart explains, "you're going to feel differently about the one that makes you feel a sense of connection." Aronson feels that bond when she buys bread from The Bread Company Montclair, her local bakery in Montclair, N.J. Of course, store loaves can offer connection too. "If the flavor is vibrant with a sense of authenticity," Reinhart says, "that's almost as powerful as knowing the person who made it." ●

Rachel Dowd is a freelance writer currently rethinking the wisdom of her favorite sandwich: tomato with Vegemise on sourdough.