

**CHEW ON THIS**



Paula Goodyer

# Wheat your appetite

Think your bread is healthy because it's labelled "wholegrain"? It pays to take a closer look.

**D**on't be fooled into thinking all "wholegrain" bread is good for you. If you've ever wondered why some breads labelled "wholegrain" still have the refined texture of sliced white, it's because they're both made with the same finely milled flour.

Surprised? Me too – but as dietitian Dr Alan Barclay points out, a bread can be both wholegrain and highly refined.

The problem lies with the term "wholegrain" on Australian food labels, which implies that the grain is whole. But a bread can be made from a flour that is highly refined and still qualify as wholegrain, provided it contains the same proportions of the bran, germ and endosperm as the original unrefined grain.

The head of research at the Australian Diabetes Council, Barclay says that while replacing these nutritious bits gives bread more fibre and nutrients, the flour is still highly refined and may cause the same spikes in blood glucose (blood sugar) as white bread.

"Bread made with finely milled flour has a high GI (glycaemic index) rating, meaning it causes rapid rises in levels of blood glucose, which can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes," he says.

This may have implications for gut health, too – a consistently high level of blood glucose is another risk factor for bowel cancer. If you want less-refined bread that's more slowly digested, don't rely on the term "wholegrain" alone.

Barclay's advice is to look for products with the most grainy bits and then check whether the ingredient list includes the percentage of kibbled grain. The higher the percentage the better, especially if the combined total of kibbled grain and any nuts and seeds is about 20 per cent. Kibble is grain that has been broken into small pieces – as opposed to

being finely milled – and is, therefore, digested more slowly.

What if the percentage of kibble isn't included? Ingredients are listed in descending order, with the ingredients the food contains most of mentioned first. If kibbled grain, nuts and seeds appear early in the list, it's a good sign.

But if wholegrain isn't always what it seems, neither is sourdough. "Traditional sourdough takes a couple of days to rise and this results in two things," Barclay says. "It raises the organic acid content of the bread and strengthens the gluten matrix, creating a chewy texture – two things that help lower the GI of the bread. But cheaper sourdough breads are less likely to have had this slow fermentation process and may have had an acid such as vinegar added to create a sourdough taste."

"The texture is the giveaway. Traditional sourdough is really chewy, whereas cheaper versions are more melt-in-the-mouth and better: it takes longer to eat, so you eat less."

While it is smart to look for bread rich in fibre, grains and seeds and that has a low GI, the sodium content counts, too. Bread is a major source of hidden salt in our diet. The sodium content of bread can vary widely – from a high 760 milligrams in every 100 grams for Wattle Valley Wholemeal Soft Wraps, for example, to a tiny 110 milligrams every 100 grams for Old Time Bakery Gluten-free Wraps.

About 80 per cent of bread manufacturers have agreed to reduce sodium in their products to 400 milligrams for every 100 grams or less by the end of 2013 but we're a long way off this target. While some breads are now down to 400 milligrams every 100 grams or below, the salt content of others has risen, a research officer with the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health, Elizabeth Dunford, says.

What about bread with no label? Some bakers give nutrient details on their website. Otherwise, a coarse texture, lots of "bits" and seeds and a chewy texture are good signs. And if you're watching your waistline, go easy on spreads or leave them off altogether. Really good bread is great all by itself.

Paula Goodyer blogs at [smh.com.au/chewonthis](http://smh.com.au/chewonthis)



**Fact file ...**

- Wholegrain bread can still be highly refined, causing spikes in blood glucose that can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.
- Look for breads that have plenty of grainy bits. Kibbled grain, nuts and seeds should appear high up in the ingredients list.
- Try to buy bread with no more than 400 milligrams of sodium per 100 grams.

**Vital sites**

**Tim taught terrifically**  
[measureup.gov.au](http://measureup.gov.au)

The federal government's campaign against tubby tummies includes tips to help cut the risk of chronic disease by reducing the nation's waist measurements. The site has a body mass index tool, measurement instructions, a downloadable tape measure and a table of ideal waist circumferences by ethnic groups. There are also nutrition and activity sections and a 12-week planner for achieving a trim tum.

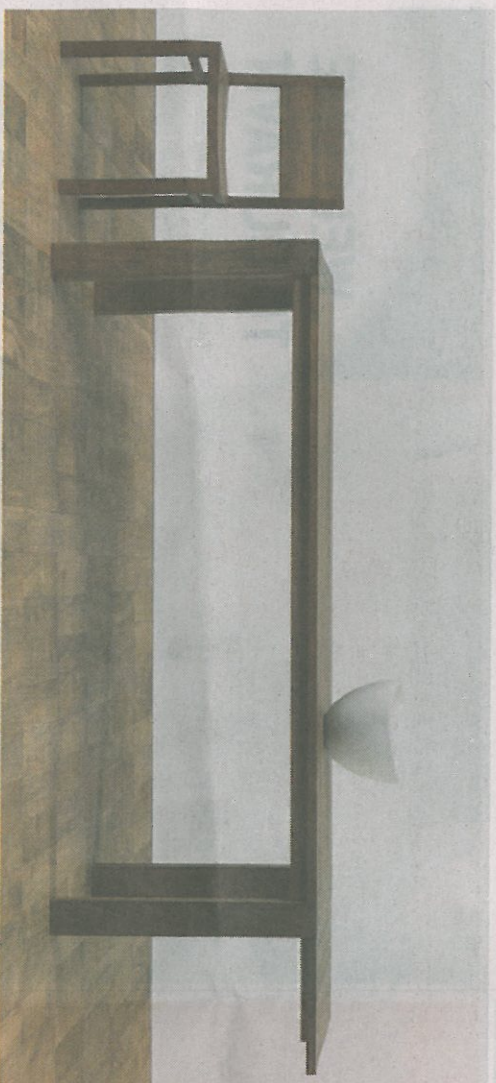


**Beat the blues**  
[moodgym.anu.edu](http://moodgym.anu.edu)

The Australian National University's Centre for Mental Health Research has created a free self-help program to teach cognitive behaviour therapy skills to people vulnerable to depression and anxiety. It has an interactive game, assessments, downloadable relaxation audio and workbook, as well as contact details for Lifeline and Kids Helpline.

**American know-how**  
[healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov)

With an A to Z of more than 1600 health topics, this website – run by the US Department of Health and Human Services – is a trove of information. Not all is relevant to Australian patients but the site is lively and user-friendly, with a quick guide to healthy living, quizzes, calculators (calorie intake, target heart rate and pregnancy due date) and global health news.



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