

People who get food assistance are eating more whole-grain products

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Efforts to encourage healthy consumption of whole grains by people receiving federal food assistance are paying off, according to a study by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.

Purchases of 100% whole-grain [bread](#) and brown rice increased among participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) after the program changed in 2009 to offer foods that better reflect dietary recommendations for Americans. The study is published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that healthy individuals eat at least three servings of whole grains daily. However, most of the grains consumed today are refined, and do not provide the same health benefits as [whole grains](#).

The WIC program is designed to help meet the nutritional needs of pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children who are at nutritional risk. Prior to the WIC food package revisions, breakfast cereals were the only grains

provided to WIC participants. Now WIC food packages include whole wheat bread or allowable substitutions, and require that at least 50% of WIC-provided cereals be whole grain, and that whole wheat bread and cereal be stocked at WIC-authorized stores at all times.

The Yale researchers examined bread and rice purchases made at a New England supermarket chain by households participating in WIC over a two-year period. The bread and rice type and amount were compared before and after the WIC revisions.

Researchers found that prior to the WIC revisions, when no bread or rice was provided through WIC, [white bread](#) dominated bread purchases among WIC households, and almost all rice purchased was white. As a result of the WIC revisions, the share of 100% whole-grain bread in total bread purchases tripled (from 8% to 24%), replacing purchases of white bread. The share of brown rice rose to 30% of [rice](#) purchases.

Researchers also found that WIC households used WIC benefits to change some of their bread purchases rather than to buy more bread overall. Participants appeared to accept WIC-provided whole-wheat bread as a substitute for white bread and saved some of their disposable income by lowering non-WIC purchases of both white and whole-wheat bread.

The authors assert that similar results on the effectiveness of [food policy](#) changes have been seen in other products and policies. For example, a study published in *Pediatrics* that examined juice purchases after the WIC revisions showed that WIC participants purchased about one-quarter less of 100% juice, and there was little compensation from non-WIC funds.

"Increasing whole-grain consumption was one of the goals for revising the WIC [food](#) packages," says

Tatiana Andreyeva, lead author and director of economic initiatives at the Rudd Center. "This study shows that the revisions were successful and necessary, given inadequate whole-grain [consumption](#) and overconsumption of refined grains, particularly among low-income families."

Provided by Yale University

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