

Wheat Alternative Carbohydrates & Grains

A carbohydrate is a nutrient found in fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, yogurt, nuts and beans. Carbohydrates provide the primary fuel source for most cells in the body. Some children with eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE) may be asked to eliminate wheat from their diets as the CHOC Children's Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic team works to figure out which foods trigger the child's symptoms.

The carbohydrate intake of the typical American diet consists mainly of wheat-based products making it difficult to find safe and nutritious foods when avoiding wheat for an elimination diet or food allergy. Luckily, there are many grain and carbohydrate alternatives to choose from that provide great nutritional quality when compared wheat. It is important when choosing alternatives to include some whole grains because many wheat-free mixes and prepared baked goods contain refined flours with little nutritional value. Some good choices for whole grains are amaranth, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, and teff. Some other foods that are nutrient-packed and provide a good source of complex carbohydrate are beans, lentils, potatoes and sweet potatoes, as well as oats, rye, barley, peas and soy.

Consider the following wheat substitutes:

Amaranth

Amaranth is not technically a grain but a tiny seed from a plant. It is sold as flour, a thickener or puffed (like pop corn). Amaranth flour can be used in combination with other flours to make wheat-free breads and baked goods. Puffed amaranth can be used as a cold or hot cereal, added as a topping to salads or desserts, used for breading meats or in baked desserts such as cookies or bars. Amaranth is a great addition to a healthy diet - it is nutrient dense containing a much higher amount of calcium, iron, magnesium and zinc than most other whole grains.

Arrowroot Starch

Arrowroot starch is produced by grinding the dried rootstalks of the West Indian arrowroot plant. It can be used in baked goods as well as a thickener for sauces, soups, and puddings. It is tasteless and can replace cornstarch measure for measure in recipes.

Buckwheat (kasha)

Buckwheat is not related to wheat and is actually classified as a fruit not a true cereal grain. It is safe to consume while following a wheat-free diet. It has a slightly sweet flavor and can be cooked the same way as rice and used in grain salads or as a side dish. Buckwheat can be ground into grits and used as a hot cereal or ground into flour and used to make pancakes or pasta (often called Soba noodles). (It is important to note that some brands of flour mixes and pasta also contain wheat so always read the label.) Eden foods (www.edenfoods.com) has 100% buckwheat soba noodles and Pocono (www.poconofoods.com) makes a 100% cream of buckwheat cereal. Kasha is the toasted form of buckwheat and has a nutty flavor. Kasha can be steamed, boiled or baked and served as a side dish, added to soups and stews or used in stuffing. Buckwheat is a good source of fiber and the B vitamins, riboflavin and niacin.

Millet

Millet is a widely used grain in India and Africa. It has a mild flavor and can be boiled and eaten as a side dish, breakfast cereal or used in making polenta. The flour can be used in all baked goods in combination with other flours. Millet has also been used to make cold cereal products such as millet flakes or muesli. Millet is a good source of B vitamins and fiber.

Quinoa

Quinoa is a seed that is a staple food source in South America. It is available as flour, flakes, pasta and quinoa puffs. The grain can be boiled like rice and is similar to couscous when prepared. Quinoa has an excellent nutrient profile: it is a complete protein source, containing much higher amounts of high quality protein than other grains. It is also high in iron, calcium, magnesium, B vitamins and fiber.

Tapioca Starch

Tapioca starch that comes from the root of the cassava plant. It can be used with other flours in baked goods or as a thickening agent instead of cornstarch.

Teff

Teff is a small African grain. It can be used to make hot cereal with a texture similar to wheat farina. It is also often used to make a crepe-like flatbread called injera, a staple in Ethiopian cuisine. (A recipe for injera is available at www.bobsredmill.com). La Tortilla Factory (www.latortillafactory.com) makes a wheat free flour tortilla made from teff. Teff provides a good source of fiber, calcium, iron, magnesium and zinc.

Sago

Sago is produced from the inner trunks of sago palm trees. It can be purchased in the form of starch or flour and can be used in baked goods or as a thickening agent in puddings, desserts, and sauces.

Sorghum

Sorghum is a cereal grain with a slightly sweet and nutty flavor. Sorghum can be used in soups, casseroles and side dishes. Its flour can be used in combination with other flours to make baked goods.

** Some children may need to avoid beans, peas, lentils, potatoes, oats, rye, barley and/or soy due to their specific EoE diet. Please check with the child's allergist or dietitian if these need to be avoided as well.*