Do carbohydrates and wheat make you fat? If you believe in science, follow along and learn about all the research that proves otherwise.

Around the turn of the 20th century, wheat consumption averaged about 200 lbs. per person annually and we did not have an obesity problem. Last year, wheat consumption was about 131 pounds per person and we have the highest obesity rate in U.S. history. What do the following studies have in common?

- Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) on-going National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)
- Nurses’ Health Study
- Nurses’ Health Study II
- Women’s Health Study
- Prostate, Lung, Colorectal, and Ovarian Screening Study
- Health Professionals Follow-up Study
- Canadian National Breast Screening Study

They all show an inverse relationship between carbohydrate intake and body mass index which means that the higher percentage of carbohydrates consumed, the lower the weight. The actual body weight difference between high- and low-carbohydrate intake groups equaled 6 to 7 fewer pounds for the higher carbohydrate consumers¹.

Some people claim eating wheat increases your appetite, but there is no scientific research to support that. One study shows that eating wheat has no effect on satiety (feeling full) or increased appetite¹ while several others show it actually enhances satiety and reduces caloric intake.³⁻⁸ These studies are consistent with the large body of epidemiological evidence showing whole grain consumption (most of it in the U.S. is from wheat) is actually associated with healthier body weights.⁸⁻¹⁷

You might have heard that wheat and carbohydrates increase harmful belly fat. Not so. A recent study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found the lowest amount of belly fat was associated with two servings per day of enriched grains and three servings per day of whole grains.¹⁸ This pattern of consumption is consistent with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans which recommend the average consumer eat six one-ounce servings of grain foods daily with at least half being whole grains. Additionally, subjects consuming more than three servings of whole grains per day had 10% less abdominal fat than subjects who ate no whole grains.

Furthermore, if you don’t eat wheat, you could increase your risk of not getting enough fiber, a nutrient of concern.
Also, because of folic acid fortification of enriched grains in 1998, neural tube birth defects, such as spina bifida, have decreased by 36 percent in the U.S. The CDC acknowledges that enriched grains, rather than supplements, are responsible for this achievement and in May 2011 named folic acid fortification as one of the top ten public health achievements of the last decade. This incredible health initiative has saved Americans $4.7 billion in direct causes. All women of child-bearing age (including teenagers) should be consuming three servings of enriched grains daily and taking a folic acid supplement.

Approximately seven percent of Americans cannot eat wheat because it contains gluten. That small percentage includes approximately one percent who have celiac disease, an autoimmune disease, and six percent who have non-celiac disease gluten sensitivity. Celiac disease, while serious for those who have it, is actually lower in incidence than autism or diabetes. Going on a gluten-free diet when you don’t need to risks trivializing the serious disease that celiac is. If you think you have celiac disease, get tested before going on a gluten-free diet or the test results will not be accurate.

You may have also heard that the wheat we consume today is different than the wheat our grandparents ate. There are no studies that show this is true for U.S. wheats.

Eating wheat is nutritious, and economical. Wheat forms the basis of some of our favorite foods so follow the science and enjoy!

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