

Legal Definition Picture a Little Grainy

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Some people claim I fear change. I prefer to think that I'm a creature of habit. For example, every day that I took a lunch to school, from first grade through high school graduation, my mom made me a peanut butter sandwich on white bread. Some kids would have bologna one day and turkey the next. My favorite sandwich was peanut butter on white bread, so I never wanted a different kind.

When you get married, however, you sometimes have to break habits. My wife is allergic to peanut butter, so now we eat sunflower seed butter (which is delicious, by the way). In addition to being incredibly hot and sweet, my wife looks out for the health of our family. Therefore, white bread is also out in favor of wheat.

My wife is always looking for the healthiest variety of bread. We get whole wheat, whole grain and multigrain bread. She bought one loaf that actually looked like someone had poured birdseed in the dough. I've learned that the healthier the bread, the more it tastes like tree bark.

Because of all the different kinds of bread available, I have a hard time keeping them all straight. It seems as though I'm not the only one, however. Last week the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nutrition watchdog group, petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to prevent manufacturers from labeling their products as "Whole Grain" and to mandate that they disclose the actual percentage of whole grain on the packaging.

Since 1993, the federal government has recommended that Americans eat more products with whole grains, as they help prevent heart disease. At that time, the FDA assured us it would establish a legal definition of what constitutes a whole grain, multigrain and whole wheat, but it has yet to do so.

Currently, the only product that is truly required to have 100% whole wheat in order to be promoted that way is bread. Any other wheat product can have as much or as little wheat as the manufacturer decides.

Michael Jacobson, the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, indicates that there is twice as much white flour as whole wheat flour in some products, such as Old London Melba Toast. Likewise, Eggo NutriGrain Whole Wheat Waffles have more white flour than whole wheat. Sadly, some companies even add food coloring to their products so they appear to be whole wheat, even when they aren't, like Lance Whole Grain Crackers.

The rules are similar for products labeled as multigrain. For example, according to Jacobson, "The only thing it means is that it has more than one grain." Therefore, the multiple types of grain in a multigrain product could all be refined flour and not whole grains. In other words, Jacobson elaborated by saying, "It doesn't mean that any of them are healthful."

Serving sizes can be misleading as well. Some products claim they have at least eight grams of whole grain per serving, but since serving sizes vary, the actual percentage of whole grain in the serving may be very small.

Not surprisingly, many of the foods marketed as whole wheat, whole grain or multigrain are more expensive than those that aren't.

Until the FDA does finally define these terms, nutritionists warn consumers that before buying products purporting to be whole wheat, whole grain or multigrain, read the nutritional information to ensure the most prevalent ingredient is the one being promoted.

Until this all gets sorted out, I think we should go back to white bread just to be safe.

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