

New study: Muesli Bars Bridge the Whole Grain Gap

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Muesli Bars are often targeted as a poor snack choice, but new research published this week in international journal *Foods*, and presented at the Dietitians Association of Australia conference on the Gold Coast in August, has highlighted wide variation across and within the category, with whole grain bars emerging as clearly healthier options.

Carried out by the Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council (GLNC), the study found two thirds of 165 muesli bars on Australian supermarket shelves were whole grain, providing up to 30% of an adults 48g target, and half of a child's 32 – 40g target for whole grain in one bar.

Less than half of Australian adults and children eat enough whole grains or dietary fibre, and the humble muesli bar may be a part of the solution to bridge this gap.

More than 40% of Australian school lunchboxes include a snack bar of some kindⁱ, and while not all bars are equal nutritionally, GLNC Nutrition Manager Felicity Curtain points to whole grain bars as the stand-out healthier options.

“Bars made from whole grains like oats, brown rice, barley, or wheat were significantly higher in fibre, and lower in sugar and sodium, so choosing these over refined bars, which are often made with puffed or flaked grains, is a simple step towards choosing a healthy bar.”

Encouragingly, the number of whole grain bars on-shelf had increased by 31% when compared to previously collected data from 2015, and average sugar had significantly declined by 10%, from 26.6g to 23.7g per 100g, suggesting manufacturers have worked to reformulate and improve products on-shelf.

Additionally, 63% of bars displayed a Health Star Rating (HSR), aiding consumers to make healthier choices, though echoing previous research published by GLNCⁱⁱ, there was no significant difference in score between whole grain and refined grain bars (0.7 stars), highlighting a shortfall of the current system, which does not recognise whole grain in its calculation.

“Parents are already under pressure to pack a healthy lunchbox, so shouldn't feel guilty about including a well-chosen muesli bar, many of which are higher in whole grain and fibre than a home-baked options like banana bread, muffins, or pikelets.”

Choose a healthy muesli bar in three steps:

- Look for whole grain bars: Check GLNC's [searchable database](#), which allows you to find whole grain products by type, brand name, and level of whole grain
- Look for whole grain claims - such as 'contains,' 'high,' and 'very high' in whole grain
- Look for bars with a higher HSR as this compares bars per 100g

Ends



To arrange an interview with a GLNC dietitian or to request images, please contact:

Felicity Curtain, Nutrition Manager Grains &

Legumes Nutrition Council™

Phone: 02 9394 8663

Email: f.curtain@glnc.org.au

Background:

GLNC runs a rolling audit of a range of grain and legume foods on shelf in the four major Australian supermarkets (Coles, Woolworths, IGA, ALDI), revisiting major categories biennially. Product audits help identify nutrition trends and track changes in the market, with all on-pack information collected and analysed; including nutrients, ingredients, whole grain and legume content, and all nutrition and health claims. GLNC and our Contributors use this information as an evidence base, to inform future projects and communications such as campaigns, media releases, research, and to grow the Code of Practice for Whole Grain Ingredient Content Claims (The Code). For personalised nutrition advice, GLNC suggests seeking the professional advice of an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD).

Take a look at our social media channels for easy tips, recipes and more!

Visit the [GLNC Website](https://www.glnc.org.au) for more recipes, factsheets and information on the nutrition and health benefits of whole grains.



ⁱ Sanigorski, AM., Bell, AC., Kremer, P., Swinburn, BA. Lunchbox contents of Australian school children: Room for improvement. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2005. 59(11):1310-6.

ⁱⁱ Curtain, F., Grafenauer, SJ. Health Star Rating in Grain Foods—Does It Adequately Differentiate Refined and Whole Grain Foods? *Nutrients* 2019, 11, 415.