

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

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**Health Benefits of Rye**

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Rye is a cereal grain that comes from the seed of the rye grass. It was one of the first grains to be cultivated 13,000 years ago but was not widely used until the Middle Ages in Europe. Although rye grains look similar to wheat, they differ slightly. Rye is lower in calories, protein and fat than wheat and contains more fiber. When ground into flour, rye is darker in color and rich in flavor.

Rye contains gluten, although in lesser amounts than wheat, which is why rye baked goods are denser. Rye can have a slightly sour taste and is often mixed with wheat flour for a less-dense, neutral-tasting product. Rye can also be used to make rye whiskey and beer.

Whole rye is higher in fiber than whole wheat. It contains soluble fiber, which lowers cholesterol and modulates blood sugars, and insoluble fiber, which helps improve digestive mobility and lowers risk of some cancers. Fiber feeds the healthy gut bacteria that work to protect the body from illness and disease. Fiber also contributes to feelings of fullness which can aid in weight management. Although rye has more carbohydrates than wheat, it has a lower glycemic index, largely due to its fiber content, adding another component that makes rye a good choice for those with diabetes.

Rye is also a good source of different vitamins and minerals than wheat, being a good source of vitamins A and K, B2 and B6. It also provides magnesium that helps control blood pressure, lower blood glucose and normalize heart rhythm. Magnesium is important for muscle contraction, especially the heart muscle.

Rye berries are the intact seeds harvested from the grass and are the least refined. These can be boiled like rice and used as a side dish, as porridge or hot breakfast cereal, in cold salads or tossed with vegetables. Soaking berries overnight will soften them and speed cooking time. Rye grains can also be rolled, similar to rolled oats, and can be used in baked goods like cookies and bars.

Rye is most often found ground into flour of light, medium or dark varieties. Light rye has had most of the bran removed, whereas dark rye flour has nearly all the bran intact and is the most nutritious. Most commercial flours are medium. The flour used to make pumpernickel is usually dark flour. Keep in mind, rye contains only a small amount of gluten, and is often mixed with wheat to make baked goods. When seeking out 100% rye products, read ingredients label carefully. Although rye is low in fat, the oils can become rancid. Store rolled rye or flour in the refrigerator or freezer.

Try using rye berries for a hearty breakfast cereal, side dish or mixed with fruit or vegetables in a cold salad. You can find these in most grocery, health food stores and online. Use rye flour in place of ½ wheat in baked goods recipes to add fiber and flavor.