THE SPROUTING POPULARITY OF SPROUTED GRAINS

Not all that long ago, "sprouted grains" were something you only found at health food stores; but with nationally recognized brand names like "Ezekiel 4:9" gaining popularity and a handful of compelling research studies, sprouted grain products are becoming mainstream.

Sprouted grains are the result of taking the mature dormant seeds (kernels) of cereal grasses (like rice, wheat, corn, oats, or barley, but other seeds and beans can be sprouted too) and providing the right temperature and moisture for the seeds to germinate and begin to grow into another plant, starting the life cycle anew. It is in this brief period, right when the shoot becomes visible as it breaks through the outer layer (bran) of the seed, but before it becomes a full fledged plant, that it is called a "sprouted grain" and assimilated into various recipes and products like breads, crackers, tortillas, pastas, etc.

But are sprouted grains good for you? Yes. Sprouted grains are whole grains, so they offer at least the same nutritional benefits as other regular whole grains. Research has yet to determine if sprouted grains offer a clear nutrition advantage over regular whole grains, but the preliminary evidence looks promising.

Some interesting research results are included below; but it's important to understand that three of the four studies were done on rats or mice and the one that was done on humans was a small study (11 subjects), so results are far from conclusive. In one study, sprouted brown rice was shown to promote better blood sugar control and cholesterol levels in those with diabetes/pre-diabetes. Another showed that sprouted buckwheat may protect against fatty liver disease, while another study linked sprouted brown rice to an increase in HDL cholesterol (the "good cholesterol) decreasing cardiovascular disease risk. And yet another linked sprouted buckwheat to decreased blood pressure.

The sprouting process can change the nutrient profile of the grain itself. Generally, some of the carbohydrates present in the grain are used as energy to grow the new sprout, so what's left behind is a higher concentration of protein and other nutrients, often folate, soluble fiber, vitamin C, antioxidants, and alpha-tocopherol (the most absorbable/useable form of Vitamin E). It is important to understand that the sprouting process doesn't produce the same effects in every grain. Scientists are able to confirm the difference in nutrients in sprouted grains compared to regular whole grains (unsprouted seeds/kernels), but are not able to prove yet that the benefits of those nutrients will be passed on to the person eating them.

Beyond potential health benefits of sprouted grains, they can add variety, texture, and unique flavors to meals. Sprouted grains are often slightly sweet, as some of the starches have been broken down into sugar during the sprouting process. You can eat sprouted grains in their whole form, like in a sprouted rice salad, or instance. Or you can try them in commercial products like breads, pretzels, breakfast cereals and more, where the sprouted grains have been dried and milled into flour.

Bottom line: Sprouted grains can serve as a creative way to add taste, texture, and good nutrition to your diet, and just may offer minor additional health benefits over regular whole grains as well. If you have questions about healthy eating and would like some personalized advice, be sure to schedule a 1 hour, one-on-one nutrition assessment with Campus Rec's registered dietitian, Annie Bell (it's free!). Information about nutrition services and links to get yourself signed up are here: https://campusrec.utsa.edu/fitness-wellness/activities/nutrition.

Sources:

http://www.foodnutrimag-digital.com/foodnutrimag/september_october_2015?pg=17#pg17
http://wholegrainscouncil.org/whole-grains-101/sprouted-whole-grains
http://wholegrainscouncil.org/whole-grains-101/health-benefits-of-sprouted-grains
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25213974
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2692609
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7002472