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PaperTitle **Whole Grains, Foods from the Past, Destined for the Future!**

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ABSTRACT

Carbohydrates have been on a roller coaster during the last two decades. Some scientists, and some pseudo scientists, have challenged their long term standing as the foundation of a healthy eating plan. This advice has been swallowed by large sections of the public who were tempted by the promises of a low carb diet. The mainstream approach to carbohydrates recognises that not all carbohydrates are equal, and that quality and quantity of carbohydrates will determine the quality of an eating plan.

Dietary guidelines from around the world position carbohydrates as staple, or basic foods. The FAO / WHO Consultation on carbohydrates in human nutrition recommended that “appropriately processed” cereals be consumed to contribute to the carbohydrate needs of people, but interestingly this consultation made no reference to the role of whole grains as a category in food intakes. The health impact of eating foods from this group has been researched in recent years. Regular consumers of whole grains have a lower risk of many chronic diseases.

Eating whole grain foods is associated with a 15 to 25 percent reduction in premature death from all causes. An increased consumption of whole grains was found to be inversely related to weight gain. Greater whole grain intake was also shown to be associated with 21% lower risk of cardio vascular disease events and outcomes. Scientists are now calling for consumers to increase their intake of whole grain foods, to at least 3 servings a day.

However, regular consumption of whole grains remains difficult, even for a motivated consumer. Grains besides wheat and barley are usually found at health food stores, at a premium price. Wheat and barley are found in major supermarkets, usually on the top or bottom shelf. Popcorn, oats and brown rice are the only grains that are easily available. In addition it is not possible to tell what percentage of grain in a processed grain product is whole or refined. Whole grain consumption is likely to remain low in South Africa, in spite of the potential health benefits, until whole grains and more food products made with whole grains, are easily available at affordable prices.