

## Kraft Introduces 2 Somewhat Healthier Cookies Made of Whole Grains



Three cookies: 8 grams of fat and 150 calories, 10 fewer than before.

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In the efforts of food companies to appease nutrition advocates and serve an increasing number of health-conscious consumers, [Kraft Foods](#) has crossed an improbable threshold - a healthier cookie.

At a nutrition and obesity conference yesterday in Sacramento, Kraft's chief executive, Roger Deromedi unveiled whole-grain versions of the popular Chips Ahoy and Fig Newton cookies - a first among major food companies.

"They're baked with 100 percent whole grains, contain zero grams of trans fat per serving, and most important, taste terrific," said Mr. Deromedi, who participated with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and 800 schoolchildren in a one-mile walk.

The cookies, which start appearing in stores this week, are the latest in the food industry's infatuation with whole grains. As large food companies wrestle with claims that they have contributed to America's obesity problem, manufacturers have added whole grains to cereal, breads, crackers and now cookies.

Whole grains are considered healthier because they are less processed and retain more of their nutrients and vitamins. Instead of refined and bleached white flour, Kraft's cookies are made with whole-wheat flour, which contains naturally occurring B vitamins, vitamin E, iron and folic acid. Whole wheat also contains fiber, which slows digestion.

Kraft's announcement was timed to the California conference in an attempt to show that the company is attentive to the health concerns of parents, who are increasingly worried about not just their own weight but that of their children. In the last three decades, the overweight rate among teenagers has tripled; in adults, obesity has doubled.

In the face of such statistics, many state and local governments have moved to purge soda and unhealthy snacks from schools. Yesterday, Mr. Schwarzenegger also signed an ambitious school nutrition law. The bill requires that by 2007, all California public schools will sell only bottled water, low-fat milk, drinks with at least 50 percent fruit juice, sports drinks and snacks that meet fat, sugar and calorie restrictions.

While the new cookies are not healthy enough to make it into California schools under the guidelines, Kraft, a unit of Altria, says that the products give consumers who are looking to increase their whole-grain consumption a choice.

But nutrition specialists warn that consumers should not think they are eating a health snack with either of the whole-grain cookies. A three-cookie serving of the new Chips Ahoy has 8 grams of fat and 150 calories, 10 fewer than the original. And there is one additional gram of fiber, two per serving instead of one.

Each serving of whole-grain Chips Ahoy and Fig Newtons has eight grams of whole grains, roughly 16 percent of the Federal Drug Administration's recommended intake of whole grains. In addition to whole wheat, other whole-grain foods are oatmeal, granola, brown and wild rice, as well as more exotic grains like millet.

In a taste test of the new Chips Ahoy version and the original, The New York Times Dining section gave the whole-grain cookies a thumbs-up. While testers said that the texture was more akin to an oatmeal cookie than a chocolate chip cookie, they said it was an overall "better-tasting cookie," with a "toasty and nutty flavor." They also found that the new cookie tasted slightly less sweet than the original.

Kelly Brownell, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University and a frequent critic of food companies, applauded Kraft for making the change, but he worried that consumers might fall into what some call the "Snackwell effect." When these low-fat cookies were introduced in 1992, many consumers used the low-fat billing to give themselves license to eat unmodest amounts. Like whole-grain Chips Ahoy and Fig Newtons, Snackwells are not low in calories.

"The population certainly needs more whole grains, but the optimum delivery vehicle is not cookies," Dr. Brownell said. Still, Margo Wootan, nutrition director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, gave Kraft credit for adding some nutrition to what was previously empty calories.

"It's impressive that Kraft was able to do two 100 percent whole-grain cookies," Ms. Wootan said. She added that many [General Mills](#) cereals, which are packaged in boxes featuring a large whole-grain banner, are made using a blend of whole grain and refined grains, not 100 percent whole grain.

Kraft, the country's largest packaged food company, says it will continue its push to develop healthier foods. It has also come out with whole-grain Wheat Thins and in the next few weeks, Kraft will start selling a whole-grain version of its macaroni and cheese. But the product will not be made using 100 percent whole grains and will have eight grams of whole grains per serving.

Yesterday, Kraft also announced that it would expand its policy changes for marketing to children to the company's Internet sites. Kraft runs two Web sites that feature games and promotions in which its brands are prominently displayed.