How Do Whole Grains Affect Blood Sugar? Transcript

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Whole grains and blood sugar: the question

Do whole grains worsen or improve blood sugar levels? Does a pervasive belief that they worson blood glucose control and actually increase risk of type 2 diabetes because they contain carbs?

But let's look at the latest on this topic with this new systematic review and meta-analysis.

Systematic review and meta-analysis findings

They included 10 prospective cohort studies and 37 randomized controlled trials. In the randomized controlled trials, whole grains led to a small but statistically significant reduction in fasting blood glucose levels, with non-significant reductions in hemoglobin A1C and HOMA-IR, which is a measure of insulin resistance.

So the results lean towards a possible small benefit without any clear signs of harm.

Effects in people with prediabetes or diabetes

However, when looking at those who were less healthy to begin with, let's say with pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes, the benefits were actually more substantial.

There just isn't much room for improvement in people who already have healthy blood glucose control. And the benefit were most clear when whole grain intake was above about 150 grams per day.

How much whole grain seems beneficial

And for reference, about a half a cup of dried oats or one slice of whole wheat bread is about 40 grams.

Lower type 2 diabetes risk in cohort studies

Finally, the prospective cohort studies suggest that just 50 grams of Whole Grains per day is associated with a 24% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the first place with even higher intakes being more protective.