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Grain products, like bread, pasta, rice and cereal, offer many vital nutrients. But many Americans may be getting too much of a good thing. Studies show that increased grain consumption, along with soft drinks, explain the recent rise in calories consumed in the U.S. Furthermore, although we may be eating too many grain products, we are seriously under-consuming whole-grains that really promote health.

Two major sets of government data monitor nutritional intake in the U.S. The Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) records what people say they have eaten over a specific time period. The most recent CSFII data available was collected in 1994-1996. Compared to the 1989-1991 data, total calorie consumption increased about 9.5 percent. That's an extra 178 calories per day. About 70 percent of the increase came from grain products. According to this data, adults average 7 servings of grains a day.

Food supply data, the other major set, looks at the American diet with information from food producers and distributors, not individual consumers. Researchers have now developed methods to adjust this data for losses due to spoilage and waste (both in the market and at home) to more closely represent what we are actually eating. Based on this data, calorie consumption increased by about 300 calories a day from 1985 to 2000. Almost half of this came from increased grain product consumption. From the 1980s to 2000, grain consumption increased by about 33 percent, to an average of about 10

servings a day.

Experts say that the CSFII data underestimates amounts consumed because people tend to underreport what they eat. The food supply data, on the other hand, may overestimate consumption by not fully accounting for all the food that disappears without being eaten. Both research methods, however, tell us that calorie consumption – and grain consumption – are increasing.

Some people may think of the Food Guide Pyramid that recommends six to eleven standard grain servings a day and say, “So what’s the problem?” But the range in the Pyramid covers diverse needs. Eleven servings a day is suggested only for those who are burning 2,800 calories a day – usually only teenage boys, active men and some extremely active female athletes. Adults typically burn 1,800 to 2,200 calories. Eight or nine Pyramid-size servings would meet their needs. Those with more sedentary lifestyles, or trying to lose weight, should limit grains to six to seven servings a day. And most people need to make three of their daily grain servings nutrient-rich whole grains. Only 10 percent of the population meets this vital goal. Examples of whole grains include brown rice, whole wheat bread, barley, bulgur and quinoa.

Recommended serving ranges don’t mean six, seven, eight, or nine different grain foods each day. If you have a sandwich with two slices of bread, that’s two servings. If you have a cup of pasta or rice – the size of a baseball – that’s two servings. What many people call a bowl of cereal is actually two or even three servings. Part of our increased grain consumption has come from grain snacks, like crackers, which many people overlook. Three to four small crackers make one serving. Grain servings can add up more quickly than you realize.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>™</sup> can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.