



Bread and grains



The staff of life



Bread, the world's most popular food, exists in one form or another in every culture and on every continent.

The history of bread dates back 12,000 years. It is assumed that, in ancient times, people who began to lead a settled way of life learned how to grow cereal plants, producing grain for food and storage. The grain was ground between oval stones into something similar in substance to today's wheat bran. The ground grain was then mixed with water and kneaded; the dough was formed into a flat loaf and

baked on pre-heated stones. This method of baking bread in the form of hard, flat, unleavened loaves can still be observed today in many countries in Asia and Africa. The flour used to prepare this bread is made mainly from barley, millet, maize and buckwheat – all of which contain no gluten.

The prototype of modern bread was first made by adding brewer's yeast or bread yeast (leaven) to wheat or rye flours that contain gluten, and leaving the dough to ferment or rise.

We owe this technique to the ancient Egyptians, who began baking such bread 4,500 years ago, although their bread was prepared from less mature grains and the flour was not ground as finely as ours. The ancient Egyptians were also the first to build ovens, and archaeological excavations show that they produced about 50 types of pastry with different flavourings. In some countries, bread cereals constitute one-half of a person's daily food intake. Latin American corn tortillas, Arabic round loaves, Indian chapattis and various Asian and African flat loaves are all types of bread, while leavened bread in all its varieties – from dark rye to crusty white – is of Egyptian origin. Regardless of the time and place, however, breads and grains have always been, and still are, symbols of life and prosperity. For the ancient Mediterranean civilisations, bread was a staple food and, at the same time, a synonym for food.

Muslims have the saying: "You can step on the Koran to reach the bread, but you mustn't step on the bread to reach the Koran."

Christian culture has given bread a symbolic meaning. Bread was long deemed to be sacred, and it was forbidden to feed it to animals. The tradition that bread should be broken rather than cut with a knife then emerged, although in many places this tradition is now only observed on Christmas Eve. In Bulgaria, the ritual Christmas bread is called *bogovitsa* (God's bread). It is usually round and decorated with dough in the form of a cross. In France, the head of the household would traditionally break the bread and hand it to everyone at the table before a meal.

Whole grains are a staple food in many cultures, including rice in the Far East, and roasted maize. In many countries grains are processed and cooked to make traditional foods. Oats are used to make porridge, buckwheat is typically cooked as kasha in Polish cuisine or grechiha in Russian. The Italians make hominy from maize, and the Spanish make polenta from corn flour. North Africans use couscous or bulgur wheat to make tabbouleh; and the Turkish cook rice in butter to make pilaf. Raw grains are used for Alpine meusli.

Grains have many useful qualities:

- After drying, they can be stored for long periods of time in the form of cereals or flour.
- Whole grains contain many essential nutrients and cellulose, thus only small amounts of wholemeal cereals or flour are needed to prepare nutritious food.



People have long benefited from the good qualities of cereals, but unfortunately many attempts have been made to “improve” them. Experience has shown that the mass production of any food, aimed at making certain products affordable to everybody, is achieved at the expense of quality. The bread we buy today, despite the huge variety to choose from, bears little resemblance to the bread eaten by earlier generations.

Many bread products and pastries are made from flour so finely ground that there is practically nothing left of the grain apart from the gluten. Such foods are low in nutrition, as the essential nutrients, such as cellulose and vitamins, have been lost in the process of refining the flour. The more finely ground the flour, and the whiter in appearance, the fewer valuable ingredients it contains. According to some surveys, the dramatic increase in the number of cases of intestinal cancer among Europe’s rural population in the second half of the 20th century can be attributed to a change in eating habits and the availability of pastries and breads made from highly refined flour. In poorer countries, bread constitutes nearly 50 percent of the daily diet, and white-flour breads and baked products have long been seen as a symbol of prosperity and wellbeing. People are now getting much less cellulose in their diets, as they rarely eat any other source of cellulose than brown bread.

Typical breads and baked goods from different countries



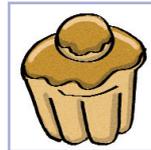
Korovai
(Russia,
Ukraine,
Belarus)



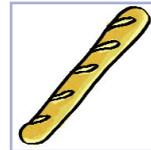
Bagel
(USA)



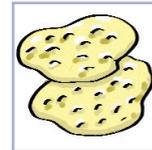
Brezel
(Germany)



Brioche
(France)



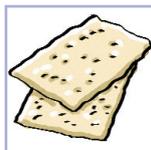
Baguette
(France)



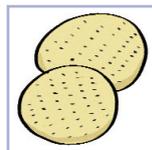
Naan
(India)



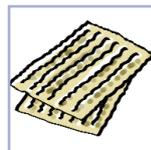
**Tandoor
bread**
(Central Asia)



Lavash
(Caucasus)



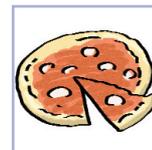
Yukha
(Azerbaijan)



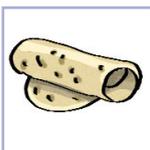
Matzo
(Israel)



Pita
(Middle East)



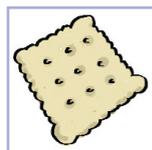
Pizza
(Italy)



Tortilla
(Mexico)



Folar
(Portugal)



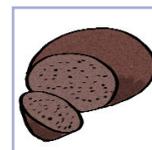
**Biscuit/
Biscotto**
(Western
Europe)



Ciabatta
(Italy)



Matnakash
(Armenia)



Pumpernickel
(Germany)