

Our daily bread and butter

A statistical pound: Meta-study highlights health-promoting effects



Photo ddp

Photograph caption: Warning: When it says wholegrain, it does not always contain wholegrain.

The fact that a diet of wholegrain is beneficial for your health in many ways is based on several observations. However, up until now it has not been clear which amounts of whole grain and corn should be consumed to protect us from ill health. The results of a comprehensive analysis, which is based on the data of 45 large-scale nutritional studies, now give greater clarity. Out of the number of participants – between 245,000 and 705,000 men and women per study – more than 26,000 suffered cardiovascular disease over the course of up to 26 years, such as heart attacks or strokes, and almost 100,800 of the participants died.

As reported by the team from the Imperial College in London, led by Dagfinn Aune, in the “British Medical Journal” (doi: 10.1136/bmj.i2716), test candidates with high consumption of wholegrain suffered cardiovascular disease and cancer less frequently than those with little consumption. They were also less likely to die of those and other diseases, including diabetes, infections and lung disease. With each additional daily 90-gram portion of wholegrain, the danger of falling ill and mortality decreased by a fifth respectively. This applied up to a daily ration of 225 grams: the greater the consumption of wholegrain the better for health. As far as the type of wholegrain products were concerned, a great variety of such foodstuffs was taken into consideration in the 45 studies. The spectrum included breakfast cereals, muesli, brown rice, wheat germ, popcorn as well as bread and pasta made of wholemeal flour amongst others.

In an accompanying editorial, Cecilie Kyrø and Anne Tjønneland from the research centre of the Danish cancer association in Copenhagen emphasised that the results of the presented study had significant relevance, without wanting to create too much euphoria. The scientists also admitted, however, that many questions still remain unanswered. Uncertain, for instance, is whether all wholegrain products have equally good efficiency or whether some are better for health than others. Also, one could not say definitely to what extent such foodstuff protects against disease and death. Its positive effect on blood fat levels and blood pressure may possibly play an important role here. There are also indications that food containing wholegrain lowers the blood sugar level and therefore prevents diabetes. The constituents on which this may depend is, however, still largely unclear.

Presumably it is not just down to digestive fibres, because wholegrain products, that is foods containing grain, are not only made from starchy flour solids, but also from the skin and the germ of the grain and therefore are rich in nutritional values vital to life. They contain various B and E vitamins, further minerals and antioxidants for instance. These are substances, which counteract aggressive radical oxidants and thus lessen several risks to health.

However, it is not always easy to identify wholegrain products as such. Colour does not always give reliable information. Even dark breads may consist of refined flour and light breads of wholegrain. When it says wholegrain it should certainly contain wholegrain, at least in German regions.

Source: FAZ from 29.06.2016, NICOLA VON LUTTEROTTI