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8-2009

### Bring on the Barley

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#### Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "Bring on the Barley" (2009). *Lake Union Herald*. 487.  
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**Soluble fiber in barley is useful in blood glucose management.**



**Barley can lower your cholesterol levels.**

## Bring on the Barley

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

**B**arley, a staple of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, was one of the first crops domesticated in the Middle East. It also played a prominent role in the Israelite sacrifices of the Old Testament. Today, barley ranks fourth in world cereal crop production, after maize, rice and wheat. It is a highly adaptable crop, growing from north of the Arctic Circle to Ethiopia in East Africa.

By Roman times, wheat had replaced barley as a dietary staple, but barley still retained its importance. In England during the Middle Ages, a standard inch was measured as equal to three barley seeds. In the Middle East today, barley is commonly used in a number of Arab dishes. Barley soup is traditionally eaten during Ramadan in Saudi Arabia. Barley is also used in soups and stews in Eastern Europe, while in Scotland barley is used for making bread and porridge.

Barley is a nutritious grain containing about ten percent of its calories as protein, and is a reasonable source of iron, magnesium, selenium, zinc, niacin and other B vitamins. It is very rich in soluble fiber, very low in fat and has only 100 calories per half-cup serving.

Unlike other grains, when barley is processed and the bran is removed, the refined product still contains significant amounts of fiber since fiber is distributed throughout the kernel. Like oatmeal, barley contains a substantial level of the soluble fiber beta-glucan. One half-cup serving of pearl (polished) barley contains three grams of fiber, of which 25 to 40 percent is soluble fiber. In comparison, brown rice has less than two grams and white rice less than one gram of fiber.

Studies have yielded promising results regarding barley's



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potential health benefits. In a clinical study, it was found that subjects who ate cookies and crackers made with barley flour enriched with beta-glucan fiber experienced significant reductions in glucose and insulin responses compared to the responses after eating the same products made with whole wheat flour.

In another long-term study, a 30 percent decrease in blood glucose level was reported in subjects with type 2 diabetes who consumed a healthy diet including pearl barley that supplied 18 grams of soluble fiber a day. In addition, barley produced smaller glucose and insulin responses in overweight women than that seen with oatmeal.

Furthermore, barley consumption has been observed to significantly lower cholesterol levels after one month. In a study of eight randomized trials, barley was found to lower triglycerides, cholesterol and LDL cholesterol by about ten to 13 percent, while not affecting HDL cholesterol levels.

All these new findings are putting barley in the spotlight. And it's very easy to include barley into a healthful diet. Barley flakes make a nutritious and healthy breakfast cereal. One can also add barley to soups, stews, casseroles, salads and a stir-fry.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.