**Rosacea: Red Wine, Red Pepper...Red Face?**

**Q.** My doctor says the red blotches on my face are rosacea. Are there foods that might be aggravating my condition?

**A.** Perhaps. While there’s no cure for rosacea, certain foods may worsen symptoms, and avoiding trigger foods may lessen flare-ups. However, these foods vary from person to person, so you’ll have to determine which foods cause you trouble.

**What It Is.** Rosacea (ro-ZAY-shuh) is a common skin disorder affecting about 14 million Americans. It’s characterized by redness on the cheeks, nose, chin and forehead, visible blood vessels, small bumps and pimples. When severe, especially in men, the nose gets red, swollen and bumpy, as if it famously did with sufferer W.C. Fields, as well as President Clinton.

**What Makes It Worse.** Based on self-reported surveys, the National Rosacea Society has compiled a list of foods that sufferers believe aggravate their symptoms. Two common triggers seem to be hot peppers and alcohol, particularly red wine. Other foods and ingredients that sufferers report worsen the condition include red or black pepper, chili powder, horseradish, tomatoes, barbecue sauce, salsa, vinegar, monosodium glutamate and hot beverages like coffee, tea and hot chocolate. However, no scientific studies have corroborated the food connection.

**Other Triggers.** Several environmental triggers—sun, heat, extreme cold, stress—may be more influential than diet. And more than 83% of rosacea suffers identified exercise as a trigger, with jogging or running as the worst offender, followed by aerobics.

But that’s no reason to forgo physical activity, which is essential to good health. Instead, exercise when the outdoor temperature is milder (early morning or late evening in the summertime and midday in the winter-time). Or work out at home or in an air-conditioned gym.

**EN’s Bottom Line.** While there is no dietary cure for rosacea, avoiding certain trigger foods might lessen flare-ups. The key is to identify your own triggers and try avoiding them as much as possible.

For more information about rosacea and how to cope, visit www/rosacea.org.

**Finding a Grain of Truth in the Cracker Barrel**

**Q.** How can I be sure the crackers I buy are whole grain?

**A.** It’s easy to be fooled into thinking a cracker is whole-grain when it has a crunchy texture, seeds on top or a whole-grain sounding name like “stoned wheat,” “multi-grain,” “7-grain” or “brown rice.” And while some such products are good sources of whole grains, many aren’t.

You need to read the fine print to find out.

**Does Your Cracker Pass Muster?** One way to be sure a cracker lives up to its advance billing is to read the ingredient list. Look for words like “whole wheat,” “cracked wheat,” “rolled oats” or “whole rye” listed close to the beginning of the ingredient list. The closer to the beginning of the list you find whole-grain ingredients, the more whole grains a product contains. Best of all are the words “100% whole grain” on the front of the package.

**Seal the Whole-Grain Deal.** An easier way to scan supermarket shelves for true whole-grain crackers is to look for the new whole-grain stamps developed by the Whole Grains Council, a group of companies, grain producers and bakers.

The redesigned stamps indicate the actual grams of whole grains in a serving of food. A product must contain at least 8 grams of whole grains per serving to display the stamp at all. A product in which all of the grain is whole grain and contains at least 16 grams per serving may use the 100% whole grain designation (see example).

Not all products that pass whole-grain muster will sport the new stamps; it’s a voluntary program. If you do not see a stamp, you’ll still need to do some label detective work to determine if a cracker is indeed whole grain. Your ultimate goal should be 48 grams of whole grains a day.

**Beyond Whole Grains.** To be sure your cracker choice is truly healthful, check the ingredient list for hydrogenated oils and no sodium overload:

- Ak-mak Sesame Crackers
- Dr. Kracker (all varieties)
- Finn Crisp Caraway
- Kavli 5 Grain
- Ry Krisp Sesame Crackers
- Triscuits Thin Crisps
- Wasa Hearty Rye
- Whole Foods 365 Baked Woven WHEATS

**Butter Is Still Butter**

**Q.** When special recipes call for butter, is organic butter a more healthful choice?

**A.** That depends. If you’re talking fat and calories, then no, organic is no better. Both organic and conventional butter provide about 100 calories, 11 grams of fat and 7 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon.

However, if you’re talking pesticides, the answer is yes, according to the Pesticide Action Network, a nonprofit group working to decrease pesticide use. It found that conventional butter is among the top 10 foods in the U.S. most contaminated with pesticide residues, by weight. Organic butter, on the other hand, is produced following federal organic standards, using milk from cows whose feed contains no pesticides.

**EN’s Bottom Line.** Keep in mind that unless you use a lot of conventional butter, the amount of pesticides you’re going to get is small. An alternative is to opt for an organic, trans-fat-free margarine like Spectrum Naturals Margarine or Earth Balance Spread. That way you’ll avoid both saturated fats and possible pesticide residues.

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