A Grain For All Seasons
Waving Fields of Grain – Barley, That Is!

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A "grain of hope" with a long lineage – that's barley. Indeed, among the grains, barley is the world’s oldest. Centuries ago, it was grown in the Nile valley, and has been found in burial chambers of ancient Egyptian kings. Jesus fed barley loaves to the multitudes hard by the Sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago. So, barley is a vintage grain, and it's also a vagrant in that it flourishes quite nicely all the way from polar climes to the torrid equator.

Many agree that barley is a "grain for all seasons." For some it's barley for beer, ale and lagers. Yes, lots of simply great barley finds its way into a foaming stein of beer by way of the product we call malt. Your HealthWise reporter maintains a fortress mentality against alcohol – and thus prefers to consume barley as a grain rather than as "suds." So let's consider it as a food.

Of all the grains, barley threshes out near the top of the grain-heap. It’s third in line to wheat and rice among world consumers, but vies for first place among the hop three for taste, nutrition and cost. What high ranking would you afford a food that finds its way into bread, breakfast cereals, pancakes, muffins and cookies? Pilafs, salads, and even snack bars? And – if you like the idea – even grits? Indeed, barley flour can be substituted for wheat at least in part (up to 25%) in most any recipe that the chef may cobble up.

But let's go on. No, it's not just "sudsy" – not by a bushel-full. Barley is rich in fiber, both soluble and non. And it’s probably fair to assert that our American diet lacks fiber more than any other nutrient. That’s significant. Barley is likely as fine as oats in waging the war against cholesterol. Your heart is bound to love barley.

Then, consider "beta-glucans" – a form of soluble fiber that stars in sugar control. That's just great for those whose sugar levels in the blood skyrocket when we indulge in pies, cakes and doughnuts. Millions of diabetics can expect to attain sensitive glucose control with barley. Diabetics can benefit from diets rich in these beta-glucans – on physician’s or nutritionist’s advice, or course.

What? No cancer prevention with this King Barley? Believe it or not – yes. Specifically, cancer of the colon. Not surprising, is it, when we consider how barley is loaded with fiber, and how cancer of the colon abhors fiber. And maybe that's only a start.

Another plus to celebrate is barley's iron content – more than spinach, serving for serving.

We’re making barley sound like a "cure-all." And indeed, some barley-product hucksters have sold it as just that. No, it’s merely straight-up great, nutrition food that lends itself to most any menu
with gustatory delight. Let's not permit all that barley to go to the brewers, for it was created for our
health, not for liver-damaging libations!

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