

Don't fear white bread. It's more nutritious today than it was 200 years ago, new analysis shows

A study comparing historic and modern wheat varieties grown side by side has shown an increase in dietary fiber and other features beneficial to human health.

This is contrary to concerns that the push for higher yields has made today's wheat less "healthy" than older types.

The 39 wheats varieties, spanning a period of 230 years, were grown three years running at Rothamsted Research in Hertfordshire Lead author Dr Alison Lovegrove said: "Despite concerns over the declining genetic variation found across modern wheat types, there is no evidence that the health benefits of white flour from wheat grown in the UK have declined significantly over the past 200 years.

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The team also found the concentration of betaine, which is beneficial for cardio-vascular health, has increased, whilst levels of asparagine – which can be converted to the potentially cancer-causing chemical acrylamide when bread is baked – have decreased.

The amount of certain sugars, including sucrose, maltose and fructose, have also increased over this period.

The stimulus for the study, according to Dr Lovegrove, was that the great increase in wheat yields brought about by the introduction of dwarf wheat varieties in the 1960s also led to a decline in zinc and iron concentrations.

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