

A history of bread

Bread, in all its various forms, is the most widely consumed food in the world. It is also one of the oldest prepared foods. Recent studies suggest humans started baking bread at least 30,000 years ago. In prehistoric times, man used to make gruel¹ from water and grains and to cook this mixture on heated stones.

Over the centuries there were two key innovations that created 'modern' bread - leavening² and refined flour.

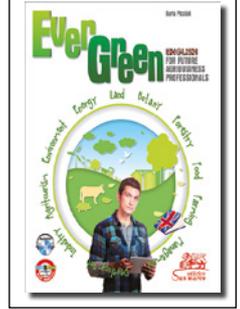
Leavening is what makes bread rise. Bread without leavening is known as flatbread, and is similar to mankind's early breads. Examples include Middle Eastern pita, Indian naan and Central American tortillas.

The most common leavening for bread is yeast. Commercial yeast production dates back to the skilled bread makers of Ancient Egypt in around 300 BC.

The earliest bread grains were ground by hand with rocks and resulted in coarse,³ whole grain bread. The Mesopotamians refined this process in around 800 BC., using two flat, circular stones, stacked on top one another to grind the grain. This 'milling' process created smooth,⁴ finely ground flour.

For generations, white bread was the preferred bread of the rich while the poor ate dark whole grain bread. However, in many western societies, this trend reversed in the late 20th century, and today whole grain bread is generally preferred for its superior nutritional value.

Bread is a good source of carbohydrates through the whole grains, and it is rich in nutrients such as magnesium, iron, selenium, B vitamins and dietary fibre.



GLOSSARY

- 1** thin food made by boiling some grain in water or milk
- 2** a substance used to produce fermentation in dough
- 3** not refined
- 4** without any lumps



ACTIVITIES

- 1** Talk about the evolution of bread in history.
- 2** What are the most consumed bread types in Italy? Gather some information about it and then write a short report.

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