



THE BREADWINNER

The drive to lose weight while still enjoying bread led one master bread maker to formulate a whole new healthy bread range

By Nishta Saxena and Diane Godley

In 2013, Christian Coenen needed to lose weight. He had type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and was 60-plus kilograms overweight. At 54, he made a conscious decision to turn his life around. A sixth generation German baker and founder of Herman Brot Bread, the diabetes diagnosis was the catalyst he needed to develop a low-carb, high-protein, low-GI bread – which he incorporated into his diet. The healthier bread kept the urge to snack under control and, along with fresh fruit and vegetables, boosted the daily nutrition his body needed. Coupled with exercise, he lost 50 kilograms in nine months and was able to reverse his diabetes prognosis. One year later he completed a half marathon.

With a baking tradition in Coenen's family dating back to the 1850s, the Queenslander was in a good place to develop highly nutritious bread that is light and easy to digest.

Herman Brot's Lower Carb bread boasts only 5.4 grams of carbohydrates per 100 grams, a GI rating of 24, and a glycemic load of one – which will appeal to people with diabetes. Tested by the Sydney University Glycemic Index Research Service (SUGIRS), the bread has also been endorsed by dietitian Julie Albrecht, who specialises in weight loss, allergies and intolerances.

“Research has identified that wholegrain, high fibre, moderately high protein, low glycemic and low

PHOTOS: COURTESY HERMAN BROT

carbohydrate are dietary characteristics that are potentially beneficial in the management and prevention of overweight, obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes,” says Albrecht, who points out that the unique characteristics of the Herman Brot range embraces these dietary needs.

As a staple food enjoyed around the world, bread is difficult to give up. But with ever expanding choices of bread and other carbs on supermarket shelves, people with diabetes and other ailments need not give up their carb of choice. Wholegrain, low glycemic index (GI), complete protein and low carb breads are all varieties you’ll find in the bread aisle of your supermarket.

Wholegrain history

When we think bread, we think wheat. Yet throughout the ages bread has been made from almost any grain man could find, including corn, barley, rye, millet and rice. Our early Neolithic ancestors gathered and threshed wild grasses and pounded the grains to make flat cakes, which they baked on hot rocks to make the world’s first bread. Around 2600 BCE, the beer-brewing nation of Egypt produced the first raised loaves of bread when no doubt some inebriated gent accidentally spilt beer into the bread flour. In the centuries that followed, countries around the globe developed their own versions of bread. Early Romans, as well as medieval Brits, mistakenly considered fine, white bread to be higher in quality and more suited



The Coenen family’s first Bäckerei (bakery) in 1850

to the educated and wealthy, leaving the coarser wholegrain breads, such as rye and bran, to the common people. Even up to a decade ago, many Australians preferred sliced white bread. But now the tide has turned. Today supermarket shelves are bulging at the seams with new styles of healthier bread.

Whole-ier-than-thou

Bread made from 100 per cent whole grains has a host of health benefits, including more intact minerals, vitamins, phytochemicals, antioxidants and insoluble fibre. Fibre is your friend in so many ways – it helps keep gut tissue and function healthy, remove excess hormones and waste products, and builds healthy gut bacteria. Most adults get less than

40 per cent of the fibre they need to support their health, so eating 100 per cent wholegrain breads is an easy way to tip the scales in the right direction.

‘Wholegrain’ refers to more than just the visible grains you can see in bread. According to consumer advocacy group Choice, a food can be classified as wholegrain even

when grains are processed and separated into their three constituent parts (bran, germ and endosperm), as long as the three parts are added back into the food in the same proportions as the original unmilled grain.

“Breads made from wholemeal wheat flour are a source of wholegrain, even if they don’t contain visible grains,” advises Choice in its blog *Is wholemeal bread healthy?* “On the flipside, multigrain breads might be bursting with obvious wholegrains, but are usually made from refined wheat (white) flour, and can have a lower overall wholegrain content than smooth, wholemeal bread.” This means you are not eating the intact whole grain and not getting the dietary benefits you need.

Julie Albrecht says there is strong evidence that backs the health role of whole grains and pulses. “Legumes protect against cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and obesity.”

Sugar can be elusive, but present in fermented or sprouted whole grains, which is calculated and appears on food labels as grams of sugar, but this is

naturally occurring. Naturally occurring sugars like lactose are not something to fret over and are very different than added sugars in food. The only way to

be sure is to read the ingredients list on the food label to see if any sucrose/glucose, fructose or other sugar source has been added as an ingredient. Many breads may

also contain preservatives, emulsifiers, colours and additives. Generally, the fewer ingredients listed on the food label, the better.

Fibre-rich breads

So, regardless whether you have diabetes or another chronic health issue, you are much better off eating wholegrain, fibre-rich, low-carb bread. A good example of bread that fits this classification, and can be found nationally in COLES and independent supermarkets, is Herman Brot – which also makes Aldi-labelled bread ‘Baker’s Life’. Herman Brot products are made from plant-based proteins (therefore are vegan friendly), all carry the 5-Star Health Rating, and fit into a unique category of wholegrain, low carb, high protein and low GI foods.

For centuries, bread has fed the soul as well as the body. Christian Coenen understood this only too well and is why he revisited traditional German baking to develop his Herman Brot brand of breads and pantry staples.

Herman Brot products are made from plant-based proteins, all carry the 5-Star Health Rating, and fit into a unique category of wholegrain, low carb, high protein and low GI foods