A grain is the edible seed inside a cereal crop. These grains are comprised of four parts: the husk, the bran, the endosperm and the germ. The husk is inedible and has to be removed before it can be consumed. The bran is a thick inner covering that is made up of several layers. The germ is the part of the grain that produces the sprout for a new plant to grow, and the endosperm is the soft inner part of the grain that provides nourishment for the seed after it is germinated.

A whole grain is one with all these components except the husk; if the grain no longer has the bran or germ there will be a loss of nutrients.