

MYCOTOXINS—OCHRATOXIN A (OTA)

Ochratoxin A (OTA) is a mycotoxin, a toxic substance produced by fungal growth during food production and storage. It is a natural contaminant found commonly in wheat, oats, and rice, as well as foods such as grapes, raisins, wine, corn, soy, coffee and beer. The principal fungal organism that produces OTA (*P. verrucosum*) lives naturally in the environment throughout Canada and all other grain producing regions of the world.

Affected kernels containing OTA cannot be optically detected by the human eye or optical scanners and therefore cannot be mechanically removed by optical sorting technology. When wheat or oats containing affected kernels containing concentrated levels of OTA are processed in wheat and oat mills, the OTA is redistributed and dispersed among the milled grain products such as flour and bran and is stable in further processing.

Currently there are no maximum levels established for OTA found in food products. However, in 2009 Health Canada proposed the following limits. More research is being conducted to determine the OTA levels found in raw grains and flour.

Commodity	Proposed Limits
raw cereal grains*	5 ng OA/g;
directly consumer grains (i.e. rice, oats, pearled barley):	3 ng OA/g;
derived cereal products (flour**):	3 ng OA/g;
derived cereal products (wheat bran) :	7 ng OA/g;