

Select Ready-to-Eat Cereals that Fill Your Bowl with Nutrition

It's no surprise that ready-to-eat, cold cereals top the list when it comes to breakfast choices—they're convenient, come in a variety of flavors and textures, and serve as a vehicle for a serving of milk. They also can be a terrific source of nutrients, such as fiber and B vitamins—but some are loaded with empty calories and added sugar. When you're faced with row upon row of choices at your supermarket, how do you decide which are the healthiest?

Nutritional powerhouse. According to Rachel Combe, MS, RD, CDN, a dietitian at Weill Cornell Medical Center, "Cold cereals are usually a good source of complex carbohydrates, which supply energy to the body steadily and provide more lasting satisfaction over the course of a morning. They also can be a good source of whole grains and fiber, which can help control blood sugar, lower cholesterol, and promote good bowel function." In addition, many cereals have less sugar and fewer calories per serving than other breakfast

Waist watchers. Studies have shown that people who regularly eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight or obese compared to breakfast skippers. Combe warns, "When you skip breakfast, or eat something low in nutrients, such as sugary pastries, you are more inclined to overeat later in the day due to spikes and crashes in blood sugar." Research also has shown that eating breakfast improves your neurological functioning during the day, which can make you more productive at work and help you make better food choices throughout the day.

But don't forget portion size—just because many cereals are good for you, more is not necessarily better. A serving for most cereals is one cup, though some dense varieties are closer to one-half cup.

Don't believe the hype. Cereal boxes are notorious for being covered in health claims: low sugar, source of whole grains, low fat...the list goes on. In many cases, the claim is accurate, but in some, the manufacturers aren't exactly telling the whole story. A cereal claiming to be a source of whole grains may indeed contain whole grains, but it's possible it contains only a small amount, and, in addition, it may be filled with sugar. When cereals claim to be high in fiber and whole grains, check the Nutrition Facts Panel and be sure it



contains at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. When it comes to sugar, Combe advises reading the ingredients list: "Avoid cereals in which sugar, or terms for added sugar, such as high fructose corn syrup, any kind of syrup, or glucose, are one of the first three ingredients."

Sugar or fiber? Sometimes you feel like you just can't win—you find a cereal that's high in fiber, but it also has a lot of sugar, or the low-sugar one is also low in fiber. What's a shopper to do? Combe suggests, "Choose the higher fiber option, as a smaller portion will more likely fill you up and sustain you until appropriate snack or lunch time." The fiber also will help slow down absorption of sugar, thereby preventing a sudden sugar high followed by a drastic low that sparks your hunger. If you choose a low-sugar, low-fiber cereal, add nuts, dried fruits, or a sprinkle of very high-fiber cereal to it to raise the fiber content without piling on more sugar.

Overall, breakfast cereals are quick and easy. Choose varieties that contribute significantly to your intake of key nutrients and carry a low calorie load, and you've got a smart start to your day. 🍌



choices such as donuts, toaster pastries, and bakery muffins. Plus, as with many grain-based foods, cereals are usually a good source of folic acid and B vitamins.

SUPERMARKET SLEUTH: TOP 10 READY TO EAT CEREALS	SERVING	CALORIES	PROTEIN	FAT/SAT FAT	CARB	SODIUM	FIBER
1. General Mills Fiber One	½ cup	60	2 g	1/0 g	25 g	105 mg	14 g
2. Barbara's High Fiber Original	1 cup	180	5 g	1.5/0 g	42 g	140 mg	14 g
3. Kashi Good Friends	1 cup	160	5 g	1.5/0 g	42 g	110 mg	12 g
4. Kellogg's All Bran Original	½ cup	80	4 g	1/0 g	23 g	80 mg	10 g
5. Barbara's High Fiber Cranberry	1 cup	190	5 g	1.5/0 g	42 g	140 mg	10 g
6. Kashi Go Lean Original	1 cup	140	13 g	1/0 g	30 g	85 mg	10 g
7. Kellogg's Fiber Plus Cinnamon Oat Crunch	¾ cup	110	3 g	1.5/0 g	26 g	140 mg	9 g
8. Health Valley Organic Fiber 7	1 cup	160	6 g	1/0 g	37 g	100 mg	7 g
9. Kashi Whole Wheat Biscuits Autumn Wheat	1 cup	180	6 g	1/0 g	43 g	0 mg	6 g
10. Health Valley Low Fat Date Almond Granola	⅔ cup	190	5 g	2/0 g	42 g	90 mg	5 g

Note: Sorted in descending order of fiber; oz = ounces, g = grams, mg = milligrams, Sat Fat = saturated fat; Carb = carbohydrates. Nutritional Information from manufacturer label and website.

Top 10 List (based on supermarket survey of popular brands, but may not include all brands available): At or below 200 calories, 2 g fat, and at or above 5 g fiber per serving.