

Shopping for Health: Breakfast Cereals¹

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It is no secret that breakfast is an important meal. Eating breakfast provides you with physical and mental energy to start the day, along with vitamins and minerals. Cereal is a quick, versatile, and budget-friendly breakfast choice. The benefits of eating a healthy cereal include increased fiber intake and lower body weight (Barton et al. 2005). However, navigating the cereal aisle at your local grocery store can be an overwhelming experience. Continue reading to learn more about cereal and how to find your new go-to breakfast choices.

Choose Whole Grains and Fiber

Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel, which has three parts: the bran, the endosperm, and the germ. The bran is rich in fiber and the germ is packed with nutrients. Refined grain products have the bran and germ removed, which strips the grain of the nutrients and fiber found in whole grains. Refined grains are enriched to add back the nutrients, but often contain less fiber.

Looking for clues on the breakfast cereal box will help you determine if the cereal contains whole grains. Look for the “Whole Grain” stamps (see Figure 1). There are two different versions of the stamp. One is marked “100%”. Labels with the 100% whole grain stamp are the best cereal choices because all of the grain ingredients are whole grains. The other version, the basic stamp, is used to show a product that contains at least half a serving of whole grains. The table below lists examples of cereals that are labeled with the 100% Whole Grains Stamp.

Another clue is to read the ingredient list. Choose a cereal that lists whole wheat, whole oats, whole grain corn, brown rice, whole grain rye, and/or whole grain barley as the first ingredient. For more information on whole grains, please visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs161>

A high fiber diet helps to reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer (Dahl and Stewart 2015). Fiber also helps with digestive health and may keep you feeling full longer. Look on the Nutrition Facts panel and aim for a

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breakfast cereal that contains at least 3g of fiber per serving. Adult men should consume about 38g and women should consume about 25g of fiber daily (Institute of Medicine, Food and Nutrition Board, 2005). Unfortunately, the average American is not reaching this goal (Reicks et al., 2014). By choosing a breakfast cereal containing a good amount of fiber, you will be closer to reaching this goal. Choosing whole grain breakfast cereals will help to increase your fiber intake. See Table 1 for the fiber content of some whole grain cereals. Some breakfast cereals contain added fiber that can also boost your fiber intake. Table 2 provides two examples of breakfast cereals with added fiber. For more information about foods with added fiber see <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs235>.



Figure 1. Credit: Whole Grains Council

Table 1. 100% whole grain breakfast cereals.

Cereal Name	Whole Grains (g per serving)	Fiber (g per serving)
Kellogg's® Unfrosted Mini-Wheats	46	8
Quaker Oats® Oatmeal Squares	46	5
General Mills® Wheat Chex	41	6
General Mills® Wheaties	22	3
Kashi® GoLean Crunch	16	8
Cascadian Farm® Dark Chocolate Almond Granola	16	5
Bob's Red Mill® Honey Almond Granola	16	3

g = gram

See <http://wholegrainscouncil.org/find-whole-grains/stamped-products> for a list of foods, including cereals, containing whole grains.

Watch Out for Sugar

When comparing cereals, pick the ones with less added sugar. This information can be found on the Nutrition Facts panel. Key terms that may alert you to a high-sugar cereal are “frosted” and “honey.” Some breakfast cereals can contain as much as 20g of sugar per serving. That is 5 teaspoons of sugar. The table below lists examples of breakfast cereals that are low in sugar. Note that cereals low in sugar vary in fiber content, and some may not be whole grain.

Table 2. Low-sugar breakfast cereals.

Cereal Name	Sugar (g per serving)	Fiber (g per serving)
General Mills® Fiber One (Original)*	0	14
Post® Shredded Wheat	0	6
Kellogg's® Unfrosted Mini-Wheats	0	8
General Mills® Cheerios	1	3
Kellogg's® Corn Flakes	3	1
General Mills® Kix*	3	3
Kellogg's® Rice Krispies	4	0
Kellogg's® Special K	4	0
Post® Grape Nuts	5	7

g = gram
*Contains added corn bran fiber

Keep in Mind Serving Size

The serving size for a breakfast cereal can also be found on the Nutrition Facts panel. The usual serving sizes range from ½ to ¾ cup, providing about 100 to more than 200 calories per serving. Try using a measuring cup to get an idea of the serving size of each new cereal. Eating more than the serving size may provide you with more calories than intended. For more help understanding the Nutrition Facts panel, please visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1127>.

Shop Smart

Consider the number of servings per box when comparing prices. A more expensive box may contain more servings, making the price per serving less costly. Also, look for generic supermarket brands that may be less expensive versions of your favorite name-brand cereals. These are often displayed on higher or lower shelves, with the more expensive, name-brand products placed at eye level.

If you are shopping for children, consider avoiding traditional children's cereals. This may be hard, as your kids will most likely be drawn to the bright boxes and fun characters. These cereals may provide more sugar and sodium per serving and contain less fiber and protein (Schwartz et al. 2008).

Dress Up Your Cereal with Fruit and Dairy

Most people eat their breakfast cereal with milk. This adds protein, calcium, and other important nutrients that will keep your muscles and bones strong, and support overall good health. If you choose a granola-type cereal, you might want to add yogurt instead, with little added sugar. Choose low-fat or fat-free versions when choosing milk and yogurt.

It is recommended that the average adult consume 2 cups of fruit per day (USDA 2010). Try adding a sliced banana or a cup of berries to your breakfast cereal. Adding fruit to your breakfast will increase your fiber, vitamin, and mineral intake.

Take Home Tip

To maximize health benefits, choose a breakfast cereal high in whole grains and fiber but low in sugar. To learn more about breakfast cereals or other nutrition-related topics, contact the Family and Consumer Sciences agent at your local UF/IFAS Extension office. A registered dietitian nutritionist is also a reliable source for nutrition information.

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