

The Best of Cereals

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Walking down the cereal aisle at the grocery store is a bit like being in a candy store. With so many choices, it can be tough to pick one that tastes good while providing sound nutrition. If you have kids, you want a cereal they will eat without giving them too much added sugar. Here are some tips for picking the best options.

Cold Cereals with the Best Nutrients



Two of the most nutritious elements of cereals are fiber and iron. **Fiber** promotes the feeling of fullness and helps prevent constipation by promoting regularity; it can also help prevent heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Most of us do not get enough fiber—and that includes kids.

Recommended daily fiber intake for healthy adults is 20 to 35 grams per day; for kids, it is their age plus 5 grams per day. **Iron** transports oxygen from our lungs to muscles

and organs via red blood cells; without iron, we would be constantly fatigued and at risk for developing anemia. Minimum recommended fiber intake is 10 mg per day. Some cereals provide 100% of daily iron needs. Choose cereals that are rich in these ingredients, such as those listed in the chart below:

CEREAL	IRON	FIBER
Kellogg's All-Bran Complete	100%	5G
Post Grape-Nuts	100%	5G
Total Raisin-Bran	100%	5G
Total with Strawberries	100%	4G
Total Cranberry Crunch	100%	4G
Total Vanilla Yogurt	100%	4G
Big G Cereals Total	100%	3G
General Mills Multigrain Cheerios	100%	3G
Kellogg's Frosted Mini-Wheats (bite-sized)	92%	5.9G
Chex Multi-Bran	90%	6G

When thinking about what young kids will eat, these choices may not be appealing. Unfortunately, the colorful cereals that do appeal to kids may be lower in nutrients and high in added sugar. Some companies have begun to market lower-sugar versions of

kids' cereals. However, they admit that the calories are still the same—the added sugar was replaced by refined carbohydrates to preserve the crunch. And, when the sugar was swapped out, it does not mean more nutrients were added.

The Best and Worst of Kids' Cereals

Some independent studies conducted by organizations such as *Consumer Reports* have found the best and worst in cereals that mainly marketed to children. Here are the findings, with the best at the top. Nutrition information usually refers to a 3/4 cup serving (read nutrition label for what is considered a serving of each cereal).

The BEST Cereal List

CEREAL	NUTRITION
General Mills Cheerios	1 gram sugar, 3 grams fiber, 190 mg sodium
General Mills Kix	3 grams sugar, 3 grams fiber, 210 mg sodium
Quaker Oats Life	6 grams sugar, 2 grams fiber, 160 mg sodium
General Mills Honey Nut Cheerios	9 grams sugar, 2 grams fiber, 190 mg sodium

They also rated the worst choices for balanced nutrition (or those least dense in needed nutrition)

The "WORST" Cereal List

CEREAL	NUTRITION
Quaker Oats Cap'n Crunch's Peanut Butter Crunch	9 g sugar, 1 g fiber, 200 mg sodium
Quaker Oats Cap'n Crunch	12 g sugar, 1 g fiber, 200 mg sodium
Kellogg's Apple Jacks	12 g sugar, less than 1 g fiber, 135 mg sodium
Kellogg's Froot Loops	12 g sugar, less than 1 g fiber, 135 mg sodium
Kellogg's Corn Pops	12 g sugar, no fiber, 110 mg sodium

Read Nutrition Labels Carefully

As with all food shopping, your best bet is to read the nutrition labels on cereal boxes. Let your child pick three or four cereals he or she would eat, and compare their labels. Choose the one that has the lowest added sugar and total calories from carbohydrates, plus the richest amount of fiber, iron, vitamins, and minerals.

Remember your daily recommended nutrition needs. You can read more about what your body needs, and what nutrients children should be getting, at MyPyramid.gov.

Consider Other Breakfast Foods

The choices of cold cereals may not offer what you hope to get in a healthy breakfast, or what your child needs to grow on. Think about limiting the days on which cereal is the breakfast choice. Opt instead for a balanced breakfast that includes a carb like toast or muffin, a protein like sausage and eggs, dairy in the form of milk or yogurt, and fruit.

Another option is hot cereal or oatmeal. Hot cereals from Bob's Red Mill, Quaker, and Farina Mills are high in fiber and low in sugar. Instant oatmeal from brands like Uncle Sam, Quaker, Erewhon, McDougall's, Arrowhead Mills, and Country Choice is low in sugar and fortified with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. As always, read the labels, as some choices do contain high sodium or added sugar.

For more information about understanding your individual nutrition needs, consider consulting a registered dietitian. I offer individual counseling and personal grocery shopping tours to help clients with these very needs. Feel free to visit my website at nutrifitga.com.

Remember to shop healthy—even in the cereal aisle!