



# Family Nutrition In Action

July 2004, Vol. 8, No. 5



This newsletter is supported with funding from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education program, USDA's Food Stamp Program, Florida Department of Children and Families, and University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, in collaboration with state, county, and local agencies. The Food Stamp Program gives nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call 1-800-342-9274 (toll-free).



## Ready-to-Eat Breakfast Cereals

All our lives we've been told that it's important to eat breakfast. And this has been good advice! Breakfast eaters can work faster and concentrate better than non-breakfast eaters. Eating breakfast tends to improve creativity, endurance, and weight management. It even appears to help reduce tooth decay – at least in young children.

In the United States, ready-to-eat cereal is among the most popular breakfast choices. It's quick and it's easy - perfect first thing in the morning when very few people have the time or the inspiration to prepare meals. Fortunately, eating a ready-to-eat breakfast cereal can be a very nutritious way to begin the day.



## Today's Cereals

Breakfast cereals, as we know them, are made from grains. The most popular breakfast cereals are made from corn, wheat, oats, or rice. Cereal can be found as flakes, puffs, shreds, rings, balls, or as popular cartoon characters. Cereal can be bright cheerful colors or dull browns and tans. Regardless of the form it takes, breakfast cereal can be a good source of nutrients and fiber. Most of the breakfast cereals available in the stores today are fortified with vitamins and

minerals, ranging from 10-100% of the Daily Value (DV).

Daily Value is the amount of a nutrient such as calcium or vitamin B6, that an average, healthy person should consume each day. Cereals that provide 10-25% of the daily value of most nutrients may be good choices. Cereals that provide 100% of the Daily Value for most nutrients may be too much. Some of the newer cereals claim to be promoting health by adding soy protein, flax, and dried fruit to their products. These additions will not hurt, but the amount in a serving of cereal is probably too small to really improve your health.

### Choosing a Breakfast Cereal

When selecting a cereal, it's important to read the product label. Cereal grains are basically low in protein, low in fat, and high in complex carbohydrate. These grains are processed into the breakfast cereals we know by adding or removing sugars, proteins, fats, fiber, vitamins, minerals, flavorings, and colors. Some of these changes are healthful, but some are not. A nutritious breakfast cereal is made from a whole grain. Ideally, 1-serving of this whole

grain breakfast cereal should provide:

- 100-200 calories
- At least 2 grams protein
- At least 3 grams fiber
- No more than 8 grams sugar
- No more than 3 grams fat
- Approximately 25% of the Daily Value for key nutrients (iron, folate, B6 and B12).

Most cereals are not a good source of vitamin C, calcium, vitamin D, or phosphorous. This is one of the reasons that breakfast cereals are advertised as “...part of a nutritious breakfast.” But for most of us, cereal **is** the breakfast. So, even if you add milk or yogurt to your cereal, and even if you drink a vitamin C rich juice in the morning, it's still beneficial to select a more healthful cereal.



Below is a chart that will help you compare the basic nutritional components found in 1-serving of 10 popular breakfast cereals:

Popular Cereal	Energy calories	Complex Carbs grams	Sugar grams	Protein grams	Fat grams	Fiber grams	At least 25% DV of Key Nutrients
***Cheerios®	110	22	1	3	2	3	Yes
*Rice Krispies®	120	29	3	2	0	0	No
Corn flakes	100	24	2	2	0	1	Yes
**Spoon Size® Shredded Wheat	170	41	0	5	1	6	No
Raisin Bran	200	46	20	5	2	8	Yes
Granola	200	41	17	4	3	3	No
***Lucky Charms®	115	25	13	2	1	1	Yes
*Frosted Flakes®	115	28	12	1	0	1	Yes
*Corn Pops®	120	28	14	1	0	0	No
***Cocoa Puffs®	120	26	14	1	1	1	Yes

\*Rice Krispies, Frosted Flakes, and Corn Pops are registered trademarks of the Kellogs® Company.

\*\*Spoon Size Shredded Wheat is a Post® Cereal Brand, which is a registered trademark of Kraft Food Inc.

\*\*\* Cheerios, Lucky Charms, and Cocoa Puffs are registered trademarks of General Mills, Inc.

If the cereals you like the best are not the most nutritious choices, try mixing cereals. For example, if you really enjoy the flavor of Frosted Flakes®, then pour yourself a serving of Frosted Flakes®. But add a handful of Shredded Wheat or a plain bran cereal to get more fiber and protein without additional sugars. If you prefer the unsweetened flavor of Rice

Krispies®, then pour yourself a serving of Rice Krispies®. But mix in some Cheerios to provide more fiber and key nutrients without adding fat or sugar. There are many combinations that will give you the flavor you like and nutrients you need.

## A Few Additional Cereal Considerations

- Cereals with nuts will have more fat.
- Cereals with fruit will have more sugar.
- Nutritious cereals - straight out of the box - make great snacks.
- 1-2 cups of cereal can be added to cookie recipes for additional texture, fiber, and nutrients.
- If you eat cereal as cereal bars, follow these same selection guidelines



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**For additional information, contact your local County Extension Office:**



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