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Have a Bowl of Good Health

So many cereals out there, and only one breakfast! We help you pick the most nutritious (and so yummy) kinds.

By KAREN CICERO

NEARLY 400 NEW cereals hit the market last year. Adding to the confusion as you stand in the store aisle: Nutritional differences among brands are more vast than with almost any other kind of food, experts say. Call it snap, crackle, huh? Some cereals are as healthy as salad, others are like scarfing down a chocolate éclair,” says Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, author of The Flexitarian Diet. “But while there are a lot of sugary cereals, happily, it’s easier than ever to find a really nutritious one.” Aside from knowing what’s basically a box of sugar disguised as breakfast, you want to pick the right kind for your body—as well as your taste buds. It’s simple, if you know what to look for. And now, you will!

THE NEW HEALTH PERKS OF CEREAL

More whole grains
Quinoa, spelt, amaranth, and Kamut are hitting cereal boxes, along with traditional whole grain oats, wheat, and brown rice. “While different types may appeal to your taste or offer slightly different nutrients—for instance, quinoa is a little higher in protein—don’t sweat what kind is in your bowl,” says Karen Ansel, RD, co-author of Healthy in a Hurry. “It’s more important that the cereal contain at least 16 grams of whole grains, one-third of your daily needs.” Research shows that downing a daily 48 grams of whole grains lowers your risk of diabetes by 25 percent, heart disease by about a third, and cancer by up to 40 percent. That amount also helps your weight; a review of 13 studies by the American Society for Nutrition found that whole-grain eaters have a lower body mass index. Look for the “whole grain” stamp or check brands at wholegrainscouncil.org.
**Extra Fiber**

All whole-grain cereals have some fiber, a great thing: The soluble kind in oats, barley, and brown rice can whisk cholesterol out of your body, reducing the risk of heart disease. "Any fiber-rich cereal can keep you feeling full for longer," Ansel adds. One United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found that women who doubled their daily intake from 12 to 24 grams took in 90 fewer calories a day than those who ate as much food but less fiber. Brands are adding more; you'll spot psyllium and inulin (a.k.a. chicory root) on labels. Although research suggests inulin doesn't give you the same full feeling as innate fiber, like psyllium it could lower cholesterol. The ideal is 5 grams of fiber per serving, period. Like a kind with less? Add fruit.

**Bonus Nutrients**

In 1938, Kellogg's became the first company to add vitamins and minerals to cereal when it debuted Kellogg's Pep. While iron (for energy), folic acid (for your heart and a healthy pregnancy), and magnesium (for your heart and bones) are now staples in most brands, about a third of new cereals also have omega-3s for good heart health. Rich sources: Nature's Path Organic Qi'a Superfood Chia, Buckwheat & Hemp Cereal, and Uncle Sam Original Cereal. Experts are also revved about plant sterols (in Health Valley's Heart Wise and Trader Joe's Heart Healthy Whole Grain Instant Oatmeal), which may lower high cholesterol. If that's an issue for you, the American Heart Association recommends 2 grams of plant sterols a day.

**Upscale Add-Ins**

Move over, raisins. Today's cereals also pack flax, chia, and freeze-dried berries. Besides elevating taste, they up the fiber and protein. Meanwhile, sugar is appearing in the fancier forms of maple syrup, honey, and molasses. These unrefined sugar substitutes have an advantage over processed kinds: They could help fight cancer and heart disease. One Virginia Tech University study found that switching to alternative sweeteners is

**MAKE BREAKFAST TWICE AS HEALTHY WITH THESE EASY EXTRAS**

unsweetened O's + a dollop of Greek yogurt + a drizzle of honey + a handful of dried cranberries = **EXTRA ANTIOXIDANTS AND PROTEIN**

cornflakes + a few banana slices + a sprinkle of unsweetened cocoa powder = **EXTRA POTASSIUM AND MAGNESIUM**

cooked oatmeal + a spoonful of almond butter + a couple of pear slices + a dash of cinnamon = **EXTRA PROTEIN AND FIBER**

**Best Box Bets**

Sarah Krieger, RD, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, name-drops her faves:

**Best for Picky Kids**

Kellogg's Frosted Mini Wheats Little Bites. In a Yale University ranking of 50 plus cereals that target kids and families, it was No. 1 for nutrition. "The tiny biscuits have more whole grains and fiber than most other kid-friendly cereals," Krieger says. Close runner-up: Cheerios.

**Best for Fiber**

General Mills Fiber One Original. It packs 14 grams—more than half of what you need for the day.

**Best for Low-Cal**

Kashi's 7 Whole Grain Puffs. A cup has a mere 70 calories and a hefty 18 grams of whole grain.

**Best for Snacks**

General Mills Wheat Chex. Crunchy with a smidge of sweetness, a serving delivers whole grains, fiber, and all the folic acid women need daily. "Chips or pretzels pale in comparison," Krieger says.

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