



NBC NEWS

from JOY BAUER

By Joy Bauer

TODAYshow.com contributor

updated 8:03 a.m. PT, Mon., Oct . 5, 2009

Joy Bauer MS, RD, CDN
TODAY nutritionist and diet editor

Oct. 5: TODAY nutritionist Joy Bauer has the scoop on how to get the most from your breakfast bowl.

Cereal catastrophes: Spot healthy impostors

Not all breakfasts are created equal and some offer little more than sugar

Enjoying a bowl of healthful [cereal](#) for breakfast is an easy, no-brainer way to start your day with a serving of fiber-rich whole grains. But not all cereals are created equal, and some offer little more than a hefty dose of sugar and refined white flour. In fact, in some cereals, more than 50 percent of the calories per serving come from straight sugar! Pick one of these “cereal catastrophes” and you’re basically having cookies and milk for your morning meal.

Here are three simple rules you can follow to make sure you’re choosing [healthy](#) cereals for you and your family:

First ingredient is whole grain

Check the ingredients list and make sure the first ingredient is preceded by the word “whole” (whole wheat, [whole grain](#) corn, etc.). You can assume oats and brown rice are automatically whole grain. If the first ingredient is bran (oat bran, corn bran, wheat bran, etc.), that’s fine too. Bran isn’t technically “whole grain” because it’s actually only one component of a whole grain. That said, bran is a concentrated source of naturally occurring fiber, so I consider cereals with bran as their main ingredient just as healthy as whole grain options.

At least 3 grams of fiber per serving

A high-fiber diet has been shown to protect against [heart disease](#) and may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. I recommend choosing cereals with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving so your family members get a good start toward meeting their daily requirement. The fiber content is typically a good reflection of how much whole grain and/or bran the cereal offers (although some cereals contain added fibers like polydextrose or inulin).

No more than 8 grams of sugar per serving

Even if a cereal is made from whole grains or loaded with other healthful ingredients, a high sugar content disqualifies it from my list of top picks. Most of the sugars in breakfast cereals are added sugars (from ingredients like corn syrup, white or brown sugar, honey and evaporated cane syrup), but cereals can also contain natural sugars from raisins and other dried fruits. Too much sugar in the morning — regardless of the source — can spike your blood sugar and get your day off to a rough start. I use 8 grams of sugar as my maximum cutoff for breakfast cereals.

Top picks for healthy cereals

Note: * indicates it contains artificial sweeteners

Kashi Heart to Heart – Honey Toasted Oat

Kashi Heart to Heart – Warm Cinnamon

All-Bran Complete Wheat Flakes

Special K Protein Plus*

Original Cheerios

Multigrain Cheerios

Total (original)

Wheaties

Wheat Chex

Barbara’s Bakery Shredded Spoonfuls (Multigrain)

Weetabix Crispy Flakes

Grape-Nuts Flakes

Post Bran Flakes

Newman’s Own “Sweet Enough” Honey Flax Flakes

Smart Start Strawberry Oat Bites*

