

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Most children, if offered the choice, would definitely prefer candy over cereal for breakfast. Most parents on the other hand would say “No way!” But, without our knowledge, many children might just as well be getting candy in their cereal bowl. It might look like cereal. The package might call it cereal. But the Nutrition Facts box and the size of our cereal bowls say otherwise.

Take a look at the Nutrition Facts box on your cereal carton. Don't worry about those % numbers. They're good for comparing one brand to another, but don't tell us anything about how good it is for children. Look instead at the Sugar line. If the box doesn't have a Sugar line, look at the Total Carbohydrate line. Every 5 g on the Sugar line is 1 teaspoon of sugar. If the label says 12 g of sugar, that 2 ½ teaspoons of sugar in each serving!

Compared to the total amount of cereal in most servings, 12 g of sugar is 44%, or almost half. Some cereal has as much as 15 g, 3 teaspoons or one whole tablespoon of sugar in each serving. A cereal with 15 g of sugar is half sugar. Half of what you pour into your bowl is plain, old sugar! Is that a candy bar? Pretty close!

What are the good ones? Look for cereals that have less than 5 g of sugar in a serving. These would include oatmeal, shredded wheat, puffed rice and puffed wheat, regular Cheerios, corn flakes, Kix, Corn Chex, Rice Krispies, Special K, Wheaties, Total and Grape Nuts. There might be others with only 5 g of sugar in a serving too. Just read your label.

The other problem with cereal is that very few of us put into our bowls exactly what the box says is 'one serving'. Most of us are much more generous. And children, if left to pour their own cereal, will be even more generous with the high sugar cereals.

Part of the problem is the size of the bowls. The bigger the bowl we use for cereal, the more sugar we're going to put into it. The larger the bowl we give our children, the more they will eat. Ask your child to make a fist. The size of their fists is about the size of their stomach. If their bowl is bigger than their fist, they're eating more than they need to fill their stomach. Give them a smaller bowl to fill.

Another part of the problem is what they have to choose from. If we only keep healthy cereals, those with 5 g or less of sugar, in the house children will eat them. If we let them choose from high sugar cereals, they will choose them. So, just keep one or two kinds of low sugar cereal at home. If they are allowed to choose which one they want, either choice will still be healthy.

Be sure to keep some kinds of fruit out for children, or yourself, to choose from too. It doesn't matter if the fruit is canned (canned in juice!), or frozen (no added sugar) or fresh. Any kind of fruit will add color, and flavor, and fiber, and vitamins and minerals to their breakfast. Give them a choice and they'll be okay.

It's fine to let children add a little bit of sugar or honey to their cereal too. Studies have found that even when they do add sugar, the amount they add is usually less than what they would get if they were eating high sugar cereal.

Keep the milk to 1% or skim. Whole fat milk for children over 2 years old can lead to problems later. Whole fat milk for adults means problems now! Be smart, eat smart, eat a healthy breakfast!

If you want to make something more than cereal for breakfast, here's a healthy muffin to start your day.

Sweet Potato Muffins

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ C self-rising flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ C low fat milk

2 Tbsp brown sugar

2 eggs

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ C mashed cooked sweet potato

$\frac{1}{2}$ C chopped nuts

1 Tbsp ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$ C (1 stick) margarine, melted

Preheat oven to 375°F. Put papers in muffin pan or grease muffin pan. Mix flour, sugar and cinnamon in bowl. Stir in pecans. Whisk melted margarine, milk and eggs in separate bowl until blended. Stir in sweet potatoes. Add to flour mixture. Mix until blended. Fill muffin cups $\frac{2}{3}$ full. Bake 30 to 35 minutes, until done. Makes 18 muffins.