

Cereal killers

BOXED BREAKFASTS MIGHT TELL YOU THEY'RE HEALTHY, BUT THE WRONG ONES CAN SAP YOUR ENERGY - BIG TIME

Pouring a bowl of cereal is a fast way to fuel up in the am. But there's a catch: you have to pick the right one. A sugar-packed bowl can lull your metabolism back to sleep and a cup of "healthy" muesli can cost you anything up to 2500 kilojoules and 30 grams of fat. Time to sort the wheat from the crap.

BEWARE LABEL LINGO

Cereal boxes are crammed with attention-grabbing health claims: "99% fat free!" They scream. "A good source of calcium!" Or, "Made from wholegrain oats!" Well, guess what? Froot Loops – yes, the sugar-laden stuff that looks like it's straight out of Willy Wonka's factory – is made with oatmeal and contains 25 per cent of your daily folate, vitamin C and iron needs. But before you rush out to the shops, giant spoon in hand, this doesn't mean it's your best option come breakfast time.

When you next buy cereal, skip the blurb on the front of the box and head for the nutritional facts on the back or side, says dietitian Sari Greaves. You want to choose cereals that have at least 3g fibre (it's good for weight loss as it'll keep you fuller for longer), fewer than 800kJ per serve and no more than 8g of sugar. There's a good reason why you'll regret making a low-kJ, high-sugar, low-fibre selection: when the sugar high crashes, you'll be

hungry again, because there's no slow-digesting rough stuff in your system.

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

If you're anxious about dusting off the bikini, opt for a low-GI brekkie, like rolled oats. A study at University of Nottingham, UK, offered a morning meal of either cornflakes and milk (high GI) or muesli and yoghurt (low GI) to volunteers. Researchers found the muesli eaters burned more energy at rest and during exercise and felt fuller for longer. The reason? Low-GI foods take longer to digest and release sugar into your bloodstream more slowly, preventing fluctuations in blood glucose levels. In other words, you get a steady drip-feed of energy.

DROP THE SALT

Salty cereal might not sound that appetising, but there could be heaps of it hiding in your breakfast bowl. According to the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health, Aussies consume 9g of salt every day, blowing the lid on the recommended daily intake of 6g (about 1½ tsp). And many of us are blind to the fact. A survey conducted last year assessing salt and sugar levels of 152 cereals found only two were suitable for consumption every day. Yikes.

To combat this salty surge, the

●
No
great
flakes

Australian Government has lobbied leading cereal manufacturers to reduce cereal sodium content to 400 milligrams per 100 grams by the end of 2013. In response, the major manufacturers such as Kellogg's, Sanitarium and Cereal Partners Worldwide have agreed to reduce sodium content in their products by 15 per cent over the next four years. The benefit? A reduction of 25 to 35 per cent in overall salt intake could lead to a 20 per cent reduction in risk of heart attacks and strokes.

PREVENT OVERPOURING

Serving sizes vary, so resist filling the bowl to the brim. A study by consumer watchdog Choice found women pour, on average, 26 per cent more than the serving size on the packet.

Eat cereal out of a coffee mug, says Greaves, and trick your mind into thinking you're eating the right amount. Put the box away so you're less likely to go back for seconds. And never eat cereal straight from the box – what seems like a few handfuls could end up being a serving or more. Finally, break that fast with a teaspoon. "Eating with a smaller spoon can slow the eating process and cut your kilojoule intake," says dietitian Joan Salge Blake.

USE THE RIGHT WHITE

Full fat milk will send your kilojoule and fat counts soaring, so use skim, which has just 355 kilojoules per cup. If skim has your tummy grumbling an hour later, stir in flaxseed or nuts

next time. (While both nuts and whole milk will help satiety, nuts also contain healthy monounsaturated fats.) Stick to a tablespoon or two and you won't blow your kilojoule quota.

MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE

There's more to choosing the right cereal than pretty packaging or a catchy ad campaign. *WH* expert and nutritionist Kristen Beck takes the hard work out of deciphering marketing messages and nutritional panels next time you browse the breakfast aisle. Her tips:

MUESLI

- ➔ Choose untoasted varieties. Opt for those with a range of whole grains, dried fruits, nuts and seeds.
- ➔ Scan for hidden sugars. These are often listed as sugar, barley malt extract, honey or maltodextrin.
- ➔ Avoid mueslis that list sugar in the first three ingredients.
- ➔ Beware of marketing jargon. Some "natural" mueslis contain up to 20 per cent fat and 25 per cent sugar.
- ➔ Ditch muesli containing clusters. Yes, they're crunchy and yum, but they're likely to contain added oils and sweeteners, such as honey.

OTHER CEREALS

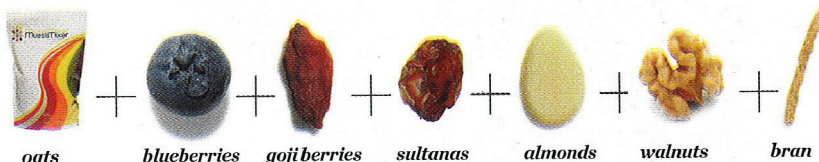
- ➔ Good cereals should be based on wholegrain oats or wheat.
- ➔ Cereals should contain less than 180mg of sodium per serve.
- ➔ Make it real. When a cereal claims to contain "fruit", be sure it's made from actual whole dried fruit, not just reconstituted fruit concentrates and purées. *wh*

85
PERCENTAGE
MORE SUGAR
IN CEREALS
MARKETED
TO CHILDREN
COMPARED
TO "ADULT"
CEREALS

SOURCE: YALE UNIVERSITY, US

WH TESTS IT

Online customised muesli
WH Editorial Coordinator Alice Treloar's verdict



"The ordering process is simple: from a list of over 55 ingredients you choose your base (oats, seeds, grains), throw in some nuts, a little fruit and any extras (psyllium husk, bran). It was delivered within two days and the servings were generous." mueslimixer.com.au

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