

GET SERIOUS ABOUT cereal

Ending label confusion

Angela Tasker

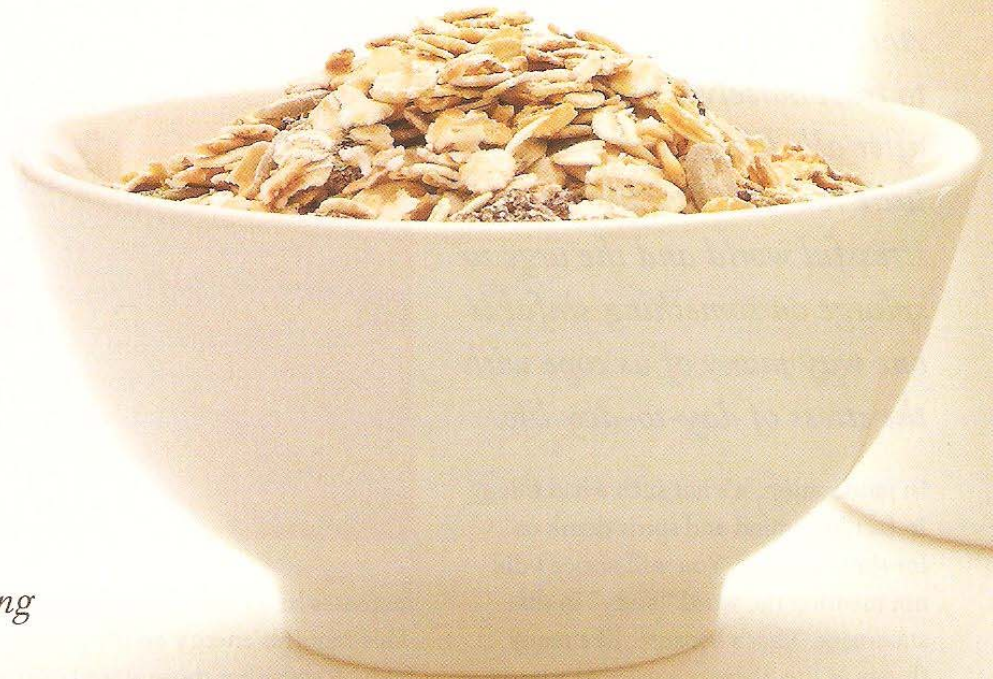
Mom was right when she told us breakfast was the most important meal. She often started the day off with hearty homemade oatmeal. But finding a nutritious cereal that is quick and easy can leave us standing bewildered in the seemingly never-ending breakfast aisle.

Let's take a closer look at cereal boxes—and their labels. When it comes to choosing a nutritious cereal, don't be fooled by the glitz on the front; it all comes down to the Nutrition Facts table and Ingredients list.

On any ingredient list the first item will be the ingredient contained in the greatest quantity. For example, if sugar is the first item on the Ingredients list, this cereal would not be a healthy choice. Instead, look for whole grains at the top of the list.

FILLING UP WITH FIBRE

"The first thing to look for on the box is the amount of fibre in the cereal," says Vancouver dietitian Ramona Josephson. "When you consume fibre, it enters your system slowly and provides you with energy in a consistent, steady way." >



CEREAL TOPPERS

When you prepare your breakfast cereal bowl, add a little flavour boost with berries, nuts, or bananas while bumping up your breakfast's nutritional value.



Blueberries are low in calories and packed with antioxidants. They may reduce your risk of getting cataracts, glaucoma, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, peptic ulcers, heart disease, and cancer.



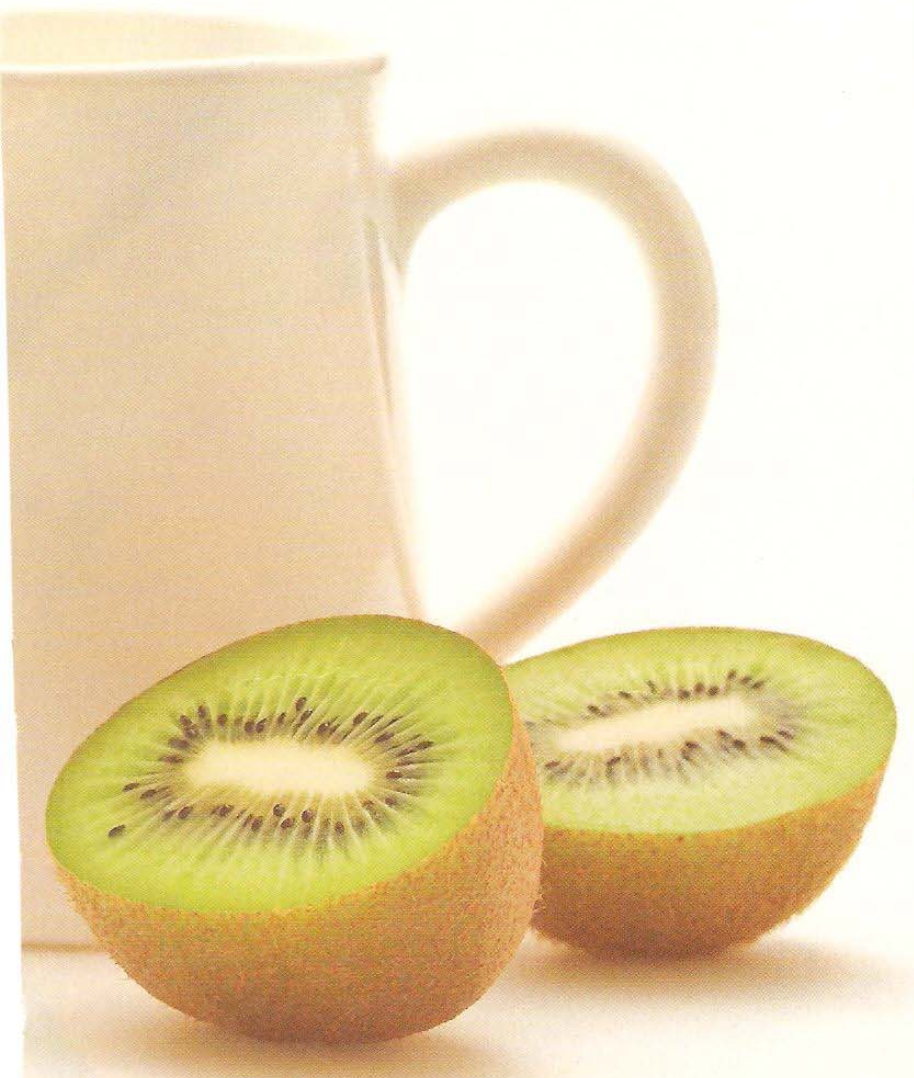
Almonds are high in monounsaturated fats, also found in olive oil, which have been shown to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease.



Yogurt is a good source of calcium, vitamin A, vitamin B₁₂, and riboflavin, which increase bone strength to prevent osteoporosis.



Ground flaxseeds contain omega-3 fatty acids that can help lower high blood pressure and reduce bone loss.



Just the facts

Check the Nutrition Facts table on the back or side of most cereal boxes, then check the Ingredients list.

- Start with the serving size; when comparing cereals make sure that the serving size for each is the same.
- Reach for boxes with a higher percentage of nutrients such as calcium and iron.
- Avoid saturated and trans fats which can increase cholesterol.
- Choose a cereal containing less than 3 grams of fat.
- Stay away from sugar when it comes to cereal; the Heart and Stroke Foundation, recommends cereals with 6 grams of sugar or less per serving.
- Choose cereals with less sodium (salt); the Heart and Stroke Foundation recommends you restrict sodium in cereal to 240 milligrams or less per serving.
- Make sure a whole grain is listed first; if a product advertises on the front of the box that it's a whole grain cereal and lists whole grain as the third or fourth ingredient, it may not contain much fibre.

NUTRITION FACTS

Per 3/4 cup (55g)

About 1/2 cup (125 mL) skim milk

Amount	Cereal	+1/2 cup skim milk
CALORIES	200	240
	% Daily value	
FAT 3 g	6%	6%
Saturated 0.5 g	3%	3%
+Trans 0 g		
Polyunsaturated 1.5g		
Monounsaturated 1g		
CHOLESTEROL 0 mg		
SODIUM 150 mg	6%	9%
POTASSIUM 340 mg	10%	16%
CARBOHYDRATE 41 g	14%	16%
Fibre 9g	36%	36%
Sugars 6 g		
PROTEIN 6 g		
Vitamin A	0%	4%
Vitamin C	0%	0%
Calcium	2%	20%
Iron	20%	20%

Organic whole wheat meal, organic wheat bran, organic raisins (coated with organic sunflower oil), organic rolled oats, granulated organic sugar cane juice, organic flax meal, organic soy oil, organic brown rice flour, organic oat bran, organic pumpkin seeds, organic barley malt extract, organic flaxseeds, sea salt, organic oat syrup solids, organic molasses, organic rice bran extract, organic cinnamon

“Research shows that eating oatmeal regularly may help reduce the risk of high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.”

TWO TYPES OF FIBRE

There are two broad categories of fibre, and we need to eat both of these in our normal diet.

INSOLUBLE FIBRE

Found in whole grain breakfast cereals, wheat bran, corn bran, and flaxseed, insoluble fibre, also called roughage or bulk, passes through the digestive system basically unchanged. Be sure to drink lots of water to help insoluble fibre do its job.

SOLUBLE FIBRE

Foods containing soluble fibre, such as oat bran, legumes, vegetables, and fruits absorb water, swell, and increase the bulk in the intestinal tract, aiding elimination. Soluble fibre is processed more slowly than insoluble fibre, keeping you feeling full longer.

Fibre relieves constipation, lowers blood cholesterol, and reduces the risk of heart disease. Choose a cereal that has at least 5 grams of fibre to jump-start your day.

EATING YOUR OATS

A review of research conducted on oatmeal over the past 15 years (*American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 2008) confirms that oatmeal lowers total cholesterol levels. This includes lowering the bad (LDL) cholesterol without reducing the good (HDL) cholesterol.

Research also shows that eating oatmeal on a regular basis can help lower the risk of high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes and aid in weight loss. Oatmeal's unique compounds may also help to reduce early hardening of the arteries.

“Oatmeal also has an added advantage in that it helps to draw cholesterol out of the bloodstream and maintain your blood sugar level,” says Josephson.

MILKING GOOD NUTRITION

Along with their serving size, calorie counters also need to watch the type of milk they use. Skim milk is a good choice because it is low in saturated fat. For those with lactose intolerance, some nutritious nondairy alternatives include soy milk, rice milk, hemp milk, and almond milk.

SKIPPING IT?

“What research has shown us is that people who skip breakfast aren't meeting their nutrient needs by the end of the day,” says Carol Dombrow, dietitian for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. “So the added nutrients [found in cereal] are very positive in terms of meeting those nutritional needs.”

When you walk down that endless cereal aisle, instead of pulling your hair out, read the Ingredients list and Nutrition Facts table first to make a cereal choice your mom would be proud of. **a**