



Lois Thieleke
home economist, Cooperative Extension Service

How to pick out nutritious cereal

A stroll down the supermarket breakfast cereal aisle can be a challenge to the most informed shopper. Health pledges, great taste, cereal fun, toys and promises of athletic prowess stated on the boxes add to the confusion of seeking a nutritious breakfast for children and adults.

Cereal provides several nutritional benefits. It is a good source of carbohydrates, which gives us energy (calories) to start the day. Getting energy from a carbohydrate source low in fat, such as cereal, is one way to lower fat in the diet. If you're concerned about blood cholesterol levels, focus on the fat in the milk. For anyone over the age of 2, use skim or 1 percent milk rather than whole milk. When a cereal is fortified, that provides an excellent source of iron, and many women frequently have diets low in iron.

Advertisements have done a good job of confusing the fiber issue in cold cereals. There are two types of fiber, soluble and insoluble. Oat bran is a source of soluble fiber. Wheat bran is a source of insoluble fiber. We need both soluble and insoluble fiber in our diets. Information is available about the insoluble fiber content of foods. Unfortunately, scientists have not developed tables that tell us the amount of soluble fiber in foods. However, we do know generally, oat bran, rice bran, dried beans and peas, and some fruits and vegetables are good sources of soluble fiber.

Many cereal companies would have us believe that their cereal products are the key to lowering cholesterol. Though there is truth to the claim that cereals may help lower cholesterol, the amount we would need to eat to achieve this is incredible. If oat bran were your only source of soluble fiber, you would have to have 100 grams of it each day to lower your cholesterol by 15 percent.

ONE SERVING of a popular cereal that advertises it contains oat bran has only 5 grams of oat bran per serving. This means you would have to eat about 15 cups of that cereal to get 100 grams of oat bran. If you are serious about lowering cholesterol, it would be better to add oat bran to various foods that you cook, besides a cooked cereal made from oats, rather than to rely on a cold cereal.

Insoluble fiber in whole grain cereals is important to prevent constipation. Some nutrition scientists believe that insoluble fiber may have a role in helping to decrease risk of colon cancer. The National Research Council, the American Cancer Society and the National Institute for Cancer Research recommends that we obtain between 20 and 30 grams of fiber a day. Children's cold cereals are generally not a good source of fiber, despite what the box claims. Rather than rely on cold cereal for fiber, give them high fiber foods such as beans, fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grain breads throughout the day to ensure adequate fiber intake.

Another cereal-related issue is the amount of sugar that cold cereals contain. This may be especially important when children are eating several bowls of cereal each day. Try to choose a cereal that has no more than one to two teaspoons of sugar (4 to 8 grams sugar indicated on the label per serving).

If your child likes to add sugar to cereal, then the lower the sugar in the cereal to begin with, the better. There is nothing wrong with a cereal containing some sugar, but whether and how much additional sugar you add is important.

To figure out the amount of sugar in the product, divide grams of sugar by four to determine the number of teaspoons per serving. For example, if one serving provides two grams that equal one-half teaspoon sugar, or if one serving contains 11 grams, that is two and three-fourths teaspoons of sugar.

What to serve on antipasto table

"The Antipasto Table" by Michele Scicolone (William Morrow & Co.; June 20, 1991; \$20, hardcover) introduces American cooks to antipasti the way it was meant to be — fresh, flavorful, colorful and delicious.

Scicolone, who grew up in an Italian-American household, was inspired by the cooking of her grandmother as well as by her many travels in Italy. She has taken the best offerings of restaurants and trattorie and set them out on "The Antipasto Table."

One of the great appeals of antipasti is their versatility. As Scicolone explains, "Antipasti can be as simple or as elaborate as you want them to be. One antipasto can be served at the beginning of a meal or as an accompaniment to the meal. For example, a brunch or dinner antipasto party for a group of friends or family could be made of two or three cold vegetable antipasti, a rice salad, chicken salad and a platter of cold meats and cheeses. Antipasti are adaptable to all kinds of meals and snacks and work well as appetizers, first or second courses and side dishes."

The Italians know so many ways to prepare vegetables that "The Antipasto Table" includes two vegetable chapters — one that features vegetables as the main ingredient and the other on stuffed vegetables — to pay homage to the variety available.

There are also all-occasion menus complete with wine suggestions, so a variety of antipasti can easily be combined into a meal. "An Antipasto Brunch" features Roasted Asparagus, Pepper, and Potato Frittata, Sausage-Stuffed Tomatoes and Parmesan Bread. "A Buffet Supper for a Crowd" includes Olive Crostini,

Seafood Salad with Pesto, Ligurian Chicken Salad, and Tomato, Arugula and Ricotta Salata Salad. "An Antipasto Cocktail Party" offers this array of appetizers: Electric Cheese, Wild Mushroom Crostini, and Olive and Rosemary Focaccia.

WARM SHRIMP AND GREEN BEAN SALAD

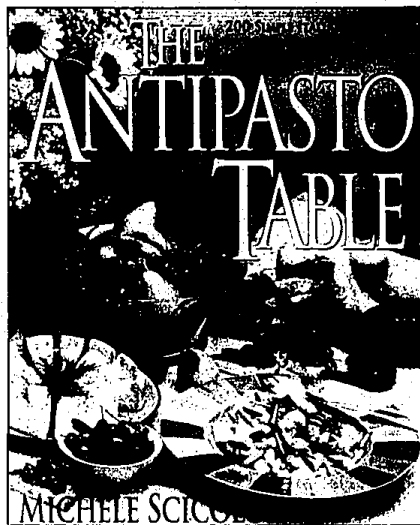
At the Travea del Pittore in Arona on Lake Maggiore you can arrive in your speedboat and enjoy this pretty salad on the restaurant's sunny lakeside terrace.

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup snipped fresh chives
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 pound medium shrimp, shelled and deveined
Lemon slices

In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, chives, and salt and pepper to taste until well blended.

Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Add the green beans and salt to taste. Cook until the beans are tender, about 5 minutes. Drain well. Place the beans on a platter and toss with half of the dressing.

In the same saucepan, bring two quarts of water to a boil. Add the shrimp and salt to taste. Cook just until the shrimp are opaque, about 2 minutes. Drain well and place them in a small bowl with the remaining dressing. Let marinate for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Spoon the shrimp over the green beans. Garnish with the lemon slices.



Two hundred Italian recipes are included in "The Antipasto Table" by Michele Scicolone.

Bake cheese, veggies on English muffin

AP — For a quick-to-fix sandwich, spread a mixture of vegetables and cheese and bake on English muffin halves in the microwave oven. Your sandwich will be ready in about 5 minutes.

SWISS CHEESE-VEGGIE SANDWICHES
1 cup shredded Swiss cheese (4 ounces)
1 cup shredded zucchini or carrots
1/2 cup chopped tomato

1/2 cup cup thinly sliced small cauliflower florets
2 tablespoons mayonnaise or salad dressing
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon dried dillweed, if desired
3 English muffins, cut in half and toasted

Mix all ingredients except muffins. Spread mixture evenly over muffin halves. Arrange on a microwave-safe rack in a microwave-

safe dish. Cook uncovered on high (100 percent power) for 3 to 4 minutes, or until hot and bubbly. Makes 6 open-face sandwiches.

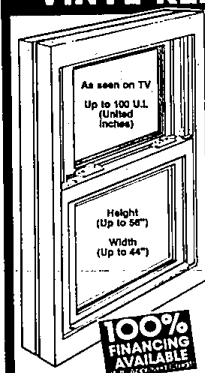
Nutrition information per serving: 150 cal., 7 g pro., 10 g carb., 9 g fat, 15 mg chol., 360 mg sodium, 165 mg potassium. U.S. RDA: 10 percent vit. A, 8 percent vit. C, 4 percent thiamine, 6 percent riboflavin, 2 percent niacin, 20 percent calcium, 2 percent iron.

(Recipe from: "Betty Crocker Super Snacks")

Cook uncovered on high (100 percent power) for 3 to 4 minutes, or until hot and bubbly.

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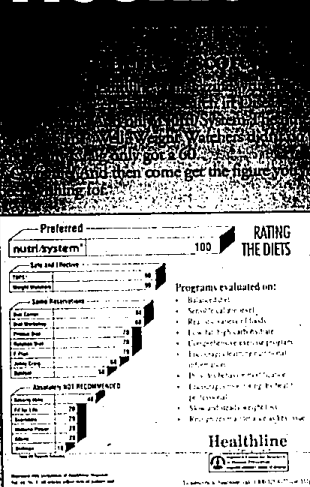
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