

NEW SCIENTIFIC REVIEW: BREAKFAST CEREAL BOWLS OUT OTHER MORNING OPTIONS FOR WEIGHT LOSS, HEALTH AND DISEASE PREVENTION

Australians who enjoy a morning bowl of breakfast cereal are more likely to be healthier and slimmer than those who eat other options, or who have no breakfast at all, according to a new systematic literature review spanning more than 230 papers over 30 years.¹

Published today in *Advances in Nutrition*, an international peer-reviewed journal of the American Society of Nutrition, the review is the first time the evidence relating to breakfast cereal and its impact on healthy diets, body weight, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and bowel health has been systematically assessed using the Australian government's stringent National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) criteria.²

The review also clarifies questions about the contribution breakfast cereals make to sodium and total sugars intakes in the overall diet.

Report author, Professor Peter Williams, Honorary Professorial Fellow at University of Wollongong and Adjunct Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Canberra, said the review showed that breakfast cereal eaters are more likely to have a healthier diet and to weigh less, and are less likely to suffer from certain diseases.

"It was clear from the research that regular breakfast cereal eaters have more nutritious diets, which are higher in vitamins and minerals and have a greater likelihood of meeting recommended nutrient intakes," said Professor Williams.

"Despite common belief, breakfast cereal eaters do not have higher sodium intakes than non-breakfast cereal eaters – a finding consistent with recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data, which shows ready-to-eat breakfast cereals actually provide only around two per cent of the sodium in Australian diets.*

"The review found that for children who consume breakfast cereal, there is no difference in their overall daily energy intake, total sugars[#] intake or risk of overweight or obesity, whether they consume pre-sweetened breakfast cereals or other breakfast cereals.

"In fact, one of the strongest findings was the benefit of eating breakfast cereal for weight management. Regularly eating breakfast cereal is associated with a lower body mass index and a 12 per cent lower risk of being overweight or obese in both adults and children," said Professor Williams.

The review also found that high-fibre and wholegrain breakfast cereals help to improve bowel function, prevent constipation, and may lower the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Additional findings include:

- Breakfast cereals high in soluble fibre (such as oat, barley or psyllium) help lower total and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol.
- Regularly eating wholegrain and high-fibre breakfast cereal is associated with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes (by 24 per cent) and cardiovascular disease (by 20-28 per cent).
- Breakfast cereal plays an important role in bowel health, with evidence that high-fibre, wheat-based breakfast cereals help prevent constipation and improve bowel function.
- Regularly eating breakfast cereal is associated with higher milk intakes.
- Eating breakfast cereal as a meal or snack replacement can assist with weight loss in adults.

According to Dr David Topping, Chief Research Scientist at the CSIRO, the value of this paper is in its scientific rigour and thorough peer-review.

“The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend adults (19-70 years) eat four to six serves* of grain or cereal foods a day for good health. The review reinforces the significant role that the breakfast cereal category can play in delivering the important health benefits of grain foods to Australian diets.

“The review includes 21 graded evidence statements and in several instances, the evidence statement is as strong as or even stronger than that for fruit and vegetable consumption,” concluded Dr Topping.

The research review was commissioned by the Australian Breakfast Cereal Manufacturers Forum of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, in the interest of understanding the body of scientific evidence for the role of breakfast cereal in preventative health.

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References:

1. Williams PG. The Benefits of Breakfast Cereal Consumption: A Systematic Review of the Evidence Base. *Adv Nutr* 2014;5:636S-673S. doi:10.3945/an.114.006247
2. National Health and Medical Research Council. *How to review the evidence: assessment and application of scientific evidence*. Canberra: AusInfo; 2000.
www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/cp69.

The review assesses the evidence based on the National Health and Medical Research (NHRMC) criteria used for the development of Australia's dietary guidelines. It has developed 21 evidence statements. These are ranked from Grade A evidence (trusted to guide clinical practice), Grade B (trusted in most situation), Grade C (supportive in specific applications) to Grade D evidence (suggestive).

Notes:

* The ABS Australian Health Survey data for sodium from breakfast cereals is reported as being about 2.5% but this overestimates the true proportion of sodium intake contributed by specific food groups. This is because the AHS data only includes sodium naturally present in foods as well sodium added during processing; it does not include salt added in home prepared foods or at the table. An estimated 64% of Australians report that they add salt at home either during meal preparation or at the table.

Total sugars data includes the sugars naturally present in foods (e.g. from fruit) plus added sugars (e.g. from honey, table sugar). There is no separate data available for added sugars because it is not possible to separate the source of sugars when analysing food content.

+ The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating defines a standard serve of grain or cereal foods as 30 grams of wheat cereal flakes, ¼ cup (30 grams) muesli and ½ cup (120 grams) of cooked porridge.