

BREAKFAST CEREALS AND SUGARS

Both home-made and purchased breakfast cereals, muesli and oat cereals may contain sugars from fruit, other ingredients and added sugars. The majority (68%) of breakfast cereals available in Australian supermarkets contain less than 8g of total sugars per 40g serve (or less than 20g per 100g).

Most Australian breakfast cereal eaters (62% of adults and children) choose breakfast cereals that contain less than 15g total sugars per 100g.

According to a secondary analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011-12 Australian Health Survey:

- **Australians (19+) who ate breakfast cereal had the lowest daily intake of added sugars compared to those who ate other breakfasts or skipped breakfast; and**
- **For children, there was no difference in their daily intake of added sugars regardless of whether they ate breakfast cereal, other breakfasts or no breakfast at all.**

Regularly eating breakfast cereal has been associated with healthier body weight measures and there is no relationship between the total sugars content of breakfast cereals and body weight.

People who eat breakfast cereals have better nutrition overall including:

- **higher intakes of vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre;**
- **a greater likelihood of meeting recommended nutrient intakes; and**
- **lower sodium intakes.**

Sugars in Australian breakfast cereals

Home-made and purchased breakfast cereals, muesli and oat cereals may contain sugars from:

- fruit ingredients including dried fruit, fruit purees or fruit juice; and
- added sugars and sweeteners such as cane sugar, raw sugar, honey, molasses, brown rice syrup, and rice malt syrup.

In breakfast cereals, added sugars contribute to taste, texture, crunch and the golden colour of cereals. Sugar can help breakfast cereals stay crunchy for longer once milk is added and the preservative function of sugar can keep breakfast cereal fresher for longer.

In Australia, the total sugars content is listed in the nutrition information panel on breakfast cereal packaging. This includes the sugars from all sources. In breakfast cereals that contain fruit, Australian manufacturers report that around half of the total sugars may come from fruit ingredients.

The majority of breakfast cereals contain less than 8g of total sugar per 40g serve

In an independent analysis of 468 breakfast cereals on Australian supermarket shelves, the Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council (GLNC) found¹:

- Half of all breakfast cereals (55%) and most mueslis (83%) contained fruit pieces which are a significant contributor to total sugars content;
- The majority (68%) of breakfast cereals, including 59% of RTEC, contained less than 8g of total sugars per 40g serve (or less than 20g per 100g); and
- On average, a 40g serve of breakfast cereal provides 7g of total sugars (18g per 100g) which is similar to the amount of total sugars in half a medium sized apple.

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The most recent data on Australian's nutrient intakes, including sugars, is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011-12 Australian Health Survey. A secondary analyses of the survey provided data for Australians who consumed breakfast cereal.^{2,3} These important pieces of research found:

Most Australians who consumed breakfast cereal chose breakfast cereals containing less than 15g total sugars per 100g

- The majority of Australian adults (62%) and children (62%) ate breakfast cereals with less than 15g total sugars per 100g.³
- Few Australians ate breakfast cereals with 30g per 100g total sugars or more³: around 3.1% of adult breakfast cereal eaters and 1.2% of all Australian adults; 7.9% of children who ate breakfast cereals and 3.6% of all Australian children.

Breakfast cereal contributes little added sugar to Australian diets

- Per capita, breakfast cereals contributed only 3.0% of added sugars to Australian diets while making significant contributions to essential nutrient intakes, including 18% iron, 19% thiamin, 13% folate, 13% riboflavin and 11% of dietary fibre.²
- On average, the added sugars in breakfast cereal accounted for less than 4g (about one teaspoon) of added sugars a day in the diets of both children and adults who ate cereal for breakfast.³

Australian breakfast cereal eaters had the lowest daily intakes of added sugars

- Australians (19+) who ate breakfast cereals had the lowest daily intake of added sugars compared to those who ate other breakfasts or skipped breakfast. For children, there was no difference in their daily intake of added sugars regardless of whether they ate breakfast cereal, other breakfasts or no breakfast at all.³
- The proportion of daily energy coming from added sugars was lower in adult breakfast cereal eaters (8.3%), than people who skipped breakfast (11.6%) or ate other breakfasts (9.1%).³ This difference represents a 28% lower energy intake from added sugars amongst adult breakfast cereal eaters, compared to breakfast skippers, and a 9% lower energy intake from added sugars amongst adult breakfast cereal eaters, compared to those who ate other breakfasts.
- On average, the added sugars in breakfast cereal accounted for less than 1% of daily energy in the diets of both children (0.8%) and adults (0.7%) who ate it.³

Daily added sugar intakes were not affected by Australian's breakfast cereal choice.

- There was no significant difference in the mean daily added sugars intakes among breakfast cereal eater (adults and children), whether they ate breakfast cereals with lower total sugars (less than 15g total sugars per 100g) or other breakfast cereals (15g total sugars per 100g or more).³

Breakfast cereal consumers have better body weight measures and better nutrition overall

- Research consistently demonstrates that breakfast cereal consumption is associated with a lower BMI, a reduced risk of being overweight or obese and better nutrient intakes in both adults and children.⁴
- Compared to people who ate other breakfasts, Australians who ate breakfast cereal had:³
 - the same daily energy intake
 - significantly higher intakes of fibre, iron, calcium, folate and magnesium
 - lower intakes of sodium
 - were more likely to meet nutrient targets

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Health benefits are consistent regardless of the total sugars content of breakfast cereals

- Health benefits were consistent whether Australians ate breakfast cereals with lower total sugars content (less than 15g/100g) or not.³
- Research consistently demonstrates that there is no relationship between the total sugars content of breakfast cereals and body weight.⁴
- Australian Adults who ate breakfast cereals had slimmer waists and were more likely to be a healthy weight than those who ate other breakfasts.³
- Children who eat breakfast cereal have no difference in their risk of overweight and obesity whether they consume pre-sweetened breakfast cereal or other breakfast cereals.⁴
- There is no difference in overall daily energy intake or total sugars intake whether children or adolescents consume pre-sweetened breakfast cereals or other breakfast cereals.^{4,5}
- Consumption of breakfast cereals by children is not associated with an increased risk of dental caries.⁴
- A systematic survey found no relationship between the total sugars content and energy density of Australian breakfast cereals.⁶

Definitions of sugars

- Total sugars: includes naturally occurring (i.e. from fruit and milk) and added sugars.
- Added sugars: The Food Standards Australia New Zealand definition for added sugars was used by the ABS and includes sugars, sugar syrups and fruit syrups, which may be added during the manufacturing of foods or added by the consumer in the preparation of food and beverages.

References

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3. Nutrition Research Australia, Breakfast choice and its impact on added and free sugars intake: A secondary analysis of the 2011-12 National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, Sydney, December 2016. <http://bit.ly/BfastCerealDataReport>
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6. Shrapnel B. Amount of sugar in Australian breakfast cereals is not associated with energy density or glycaemic index: results of a systematic survey. *Nutr Diet* 2013;70;235-40.

About the Australian Breakfast Cereal Manufacturers Forum (ABCMF)

The ABCMF provides evidence-based, practical information so Australians can have a better understanding of the true value of breakfast cereals and breakfast as part of a healthy lifestyle. The ABCMF is a forum of the Australian Food and Grocery Council.

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