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UNHEALTHY CEREALS FOR KIDS

Nutritionists warn of sugar, sodium, lack of fibre

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Parents have been warned popular family cereals are often packed with more sugar than they realise, amid claims the wrong breakfast choice could affect their child's metabolism for the entire day.



While eggs, avocado on toast or oats with Greek yoghurt is the recommended choice for breakfast among dietitians, cereals remain a popular morning choice for families, prompting health warnings from nutritionists.

Australian Catholic University food and nutrition scientist Emma Beckett, Live Better Nutrition dietitian Tania Mathewson and Diet Yumm director Purva Gulyani have ranked supermarket cereals in order of what they deemed to be healthiest – assessing fibre, sugar, salt and ingredients.

While plain rolled oats were named the healthiest option, just above perennial family favourites such as All-Bran and Weet-Bix, popular cereal Corn Flakes was placed 10th on the list, only marginally more healthy than Coco Pops and Froot Loops.

Dr Beckett said the base of corn, sugar, salt and barley extract, placed Corn Flakes high on the glycaemic index, causing a greater spike in blood sugar levels.

It also had the largest sodium quantity of all analysed cereals.

“People might be surprised, because Corn Flakes, they sound really plain and simple, but they are actually quite high glycaemic index and they’re not high fibre,” Dr Beckett said.

Ms Mathewson said Crunhcy Nut Corn Flakes had the potential to cause glucose spikes and negatively impact metabolism, with more than seven teaspoons of sugar per 100g serve and just 3.7g of fibre. “This is not a good start to the day,” she said.

Similarly placed low for nutrition was Nutri-Grain which, despite being promoted as being for athletes, contained the equivalent sugar content of six squares of chocolate in every 100g.

The cereal contained the highest portion of protein among all ranked (21.8g per 100g) and is infused with iron and calcium, but Mrs Gulyani said its lack of fibre meant it was best left for those with very high energy demands.

“It’s OK for a child at school, completing lots of sport and training, not for those sitting behind a desk all day ... they are just increasing insulin spike and unbalanced blood sugar levels,” Mrs Gulyani said.

However oats were deemed the top choice for a breakfast cereal because of their high fibre content and range of health benefits.

“They’ve got a particular type of soluble fibre called beta-glucans, which really help lower cholesterol,” Dr Beckett said. She said oats’ naturally low sugar content also helped support steady energy levels throughout the morning.

“You can eat them warm, add fruits or nuts, do overnight oats and add yoghurt. There’s all kinds of ways you can eat them,” she said.

Unsurprisingly, Froot Loops had the highest sugar content on the list, causing a higher, faster spike in blood sugar levels.

“When kids start their day with such high sugar levels, you set them up for a bad day metabolically,” Mrs Gulyani said. “We would prefer to start them with something much lower in sugar.”