Judge the Box by Its Cover!
Cartoons on kids’ cereal boxes can reveal an unhealthy choice

“Parents should not be fooled into thinking that cereals with labels like ‘reduced sugar,’ ‘low fat’ or ‘whole grain’ have fewer calories - they do not! To find a healthy cereal, read the nutrition facts on the back of the box and look for low sugar, high fiber choices.”

Marlene Schwartz, Deputy Director
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CARE Tips:
Check the nutrition label on the cereal box. Choose cereals that have:

- less than 4 grams of sugar per serving
- the most fiber you can find

Here are some examples:

- Cheerios — 1 grams of sugar, 3 grams of fiber
- Chex Rice — 2 grams of sugar, 1 gram of fiber
- Corn Flakes — 2 grams of sugar, 1 gram of fiber

Add some fresh fruit to the cereal to boost the fiber and nutrition and make it taste sweeter.
You’ve heard it hundreds of times: breakfast is the most important meal of the day. This is especially true for children. Children who eat breakfast are able to think better in school and are less likely to be overweight. Ready-to-eat cold cereals are commonly served to children.

But are all types of cereal healthy for children’s growing bodies? Yale University researchers studied the nutrient content of 161 cereals and compared the ones sold as “children’s cereal” with “non-children’s” or adult cereals. In this study, children’s cereal means that the package had a famous character, a cartoon drawing, a television or movie theme, a children’s activity, or it was listed as a children’s cereal on the company’s website.

The results showed that:

- Children’s cereal was packed with more calories (energy), sugar, and salt (sodium), but had less healthy nutrients like fiber and protein.
- Most of the children’s cereal failed to meet the National Nutritional Guidelines for foods served in schools because of high sugar or salt content.
- Cereals that claimed to be good for one’s health had lower sugar content, but were not healthier in terms of the amount of fat, sodium, fiber, protein, or calories (energy).

**Bottom Line**

Children’s ready-to-eat cereals are not as nutritious as “adult” cereals.

**Definitions**

**Nutrients:** A substance taken from the environment that the body uses as fuel. The foods we eat contain nutrients. Types of common and essential nutrients are protein, carbohydrates or starches, fats or oils, minerals, vitamins, and water.

**National Nutritional Guidelines for foods sold in schools:** Foods should contain no more than 35% energy (calories) from fat, no more than 10% of energy (calories) from saturated fat, no more than 35% of their weight from sugars, and no more than 230 mg of sodium per serving.