

Oatmeal & Beyond

THE COOLEST HOT CEREALS

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Face it. Hot cereals aren't exactly *hot*.

But if they're whole grain, not smothered in sugar or salt, and dressed up with fruits, nuts, or other flavorings, you've got yourself one heckuva healthy, cheap, and convenient breakfast.

Here's how to find a hot cereal that will knock your slippers off.

The information for this article was compiled by Danielle Hazard.

1. Getcha whole grains. Whole grains are the rule, not the exception, on hot-cereal shelves. Even Cream of Wheat now comes in a whole-grain version. In fact, other than Cream of Rice, grits, original Cream of Wheat, and a few others, it's pretty much a whole-grain sweep.

Do some whole grains beat others? Not by enough to matter. Although oatmeal lowers cholesterol (thanks to its gummy, "viscous" soluble fiber), the drop isn't huge. (See "Playing Hearts," p. 12.)

What's more, studies find a lower risk of heart disease and diabetes in people who eat *any* whole-grain cereals, especially those (like whole wheat) that are rich in non-gummy, insoluble fiber.

Your best bet: play the whole-grain hot-cereal field, so you don't get bored.

2. Find the real fiber. Most whole-grain hot cereals have 4 to 5 grams of fiber per serving (40 grams dry, which cooks up to about 1 cup). Exceptions: most brown rice cereals have about 2 grams and most cereals with added oat or wheat bran hit 6 to 10 grams.

If you eat instant oatmeal, keep in mind that some of its fiber could come from

added isolated fibers like inulin (also called chicory root extract) or maltodextrin. While not harmful, that extra fiber may not do much for you.

Inulin—which supplies the extra fiber in Kashi Heart to Heart and GoLean, for example—may nourish the good bacteria in your gut, but so far, it's not clear whether that lowers your risk of disease. And there's no solid evidence that inulin boosts regularity, lowers cholesterol, curbs blood sugar, or has any of the other benefits of the intact fiber in bran. (See "Fiber Free-for-All," *NAH* Jul./Aug. 2008, p. 1.)

Ditto for maltodextrin, which accounts for the extra fiber in Quaker cereals like Take Heart, High Fiber, and Weight Control.

Companies don't add isolated fibers to their non-instant cereals. The fiber occurs naturally in the cereals' oats or other grains. Some could also come from added wheat bran or oat bran. (That's how Bob's Red Mill Organic High Fiber hits 10 grams of fiber per serving, for example.)

Bran is the fiber-rich outer layer of the grain's kernel. We count bran as a whole grain because it supplies much of what's missing from refined grains.

3. Hold the sugar. A packet of Quaker sweetened instant oatmeal—like Maple & Brown Sugar or Apples & Cinnamon—weighs around 40 grams (about 1½ ounces). That includes some 13 grams (3 teaspoons) of sugar, almost all of it table sugar. (Only a gram or two of sugar comes from the oatmeal's fruit, says Quaker.)

Dr. McDougall's Organic Light, Kashi, Nature's Path Organic, Whole Foods 365 Organic, and some others get most of their added sugar from evaporated cane juice. To your body, it's all the same.

If you want to cut the empty calories (and maybe some excess sweetness), here are some options:

■ **Less sugar, plus Splenda.** A packet of Quaker Lower Sugar instant oatmeal has only about a teaspoon (4 to 6 grams) of sugar. The company replaces the missing sugar with the safe artificial sweetener sucralose (Splenda). Quaker Take Heart also mixes its two teaspoons (9 grams) of sugar with sucralose. You save 16 calories for every teaspoon of sugar that's replaced, but the sweetness stays.



Photos: © William Berry/fotolia.com (cereal bowl), Bob's Red Mill, Nick Waring (all others).



Our favorite, period.



Toasted wheat makes the difference.



A nice twist on traditional oats.



Hearty and satisfying.



Can't tell it's not regular Cream of Wheat.



Like grits? Give it a try.

■ **Splenda plus acesulfame potassium.** Quaker Weight Control and McCann's Sugar Free Irish Oatmeal replace all of their sugar with artificial sweeteners, but they pair their sucralose with poorly tested acesulfame potassium. Leave them on the shelf.

■ **Less sugar, period.** Some cereals—like Quaker Simple Harvest Maple Brown Sugar with Pecans—cut the sugar to 2 teaspoons (9 grams) and don't add any artificial sweeteners. Better yet, Quaker High Fiber, Kashi GoLean, and Dr. McDougall's Organic Light instant oatmeals trim the sugar to 1½ teaspoons (7 grams) or less. So does our favorite sweetened cereal, Trader Joe's frozen Steelcut Oatmeal.

■ **No added sugar.** Start with one of our top-tasting cereals that get all of their sweetness from added fruit (Bob's Red Mill Muesli; Bob's Red Mill Apple, Cinnamon & Grains; and Hodgson Mill Apples & More Muesli) and jazz it up if you think it needs more. Or perk up a no-sugar, no-fruit cereal like Wheatena, Whole Grain Cream of Wheat, or Bob's Red Mill 5 Grain. (For tips, see Step 5.)

4. Watch the sodium. Most non-instant hot cereals have no sodium. Most instant hot cereals do. If you want instant, look for brands with sodium levels closer



Claim Control

“With 7 grams of protein, 6 grams of fiber, and whole grain oats, Quaker Weight Control Oatmeal can help you feel satisfied,” says the label. “Research shows that people who ate Quaker Weight Control Oatmeal as part of a reduced calorie diet with moderate exercise lost weight.”

The catch: Quaker randomly assigned 40 overweight or obese people to either walk (15 to 30 minutes a day) or to walk, eat a packet of Weight Control, and cut 500 calories out of their diet. Only people in what Quaker calls the “oatmeal group” lost weight.

The *oatmeal* group? The *calorie-cutting* group is more like it. So much for solid research.

In theory, eating more protein may help curb your appetite, but Weight Control has only an extra 3 grams (from more oats and added whey protein isolate). You'd get that much from a third of a cup of fat-free milk. And the cereal's additional 3 grams of fiber (some of it from extra oats, some of it from maltodextrin) is unlikely to matter much.

Weight Control has no fewer calories than many other instant oatmeals because it replaces sugar with extra oatmeal. That might be good—if it kept your hunger at bay longer—except for one problem: Quaker sweetens Weight Control not just with the safe artificial sweetener Splenda, but with poorly tested acesulfame potassium.

Any whole-grain hot cereal may help you lose weight. That's because it sticks to your ribs, not because of its marketing hype.

to 100 milligrams per serving (Kashi GoLean, Quaker Take Heart) than to an unnecessarily high 250 to 300 mg (Quaker Weight Control and Oatmeal Express).

Dr. McDougall's instant oatmeal cups (75 to 130 mg of sodium, according to the labels) look like they're at the low end. But those numbers are for just half a single-serve cup. Double them and Dr. McD is

smack in the middle, sodium-wise. (You *do* get almost twice as much oatmeal as Quaker puts in its packets, though.)

5. Have it your way. Quaker Take Heart's blueberries are dolled up with corn syrup, natural blueberry flavor, and oil. And they're mixed in with blueberry-flavored fruit pieces (made of dried figs, corn syrup, corn starch, sugar, blueberry concentrate, a smidgen of partially hydrogenated oil, and Blue 2 and Red 40 food dyes). Mmm.

For a bowl of hot cereal that you'll remember all morning, start with an unsweetened cereal and add your own fixin's. If you're short on time, use a quick-cooking version. They have a more distinct texture than the mushier instants, and many take only 2 or 3 minutes in the microwave. (See the photos on p. 11 for our favorites.)

For more flavor, cook the cereal in milk instead of water, suggests our Healthy Cook, Kate Sherwood. Then try adding:

- almonds & honey
- applesauce, cinnamon, & raisins
- dried cranberries (cook the cereal in half milk, half orange juice instead of water)
- dried cherries, dried blueberries, & dried strawberries
- dates & pecans
- roasted and salted cashews & brown sugar.

You'll never rip open a packet of instant again. 🍌

Playing Hearts

There's nothing wrong with Kashi Heart to Heart or Quaker Take Heart instant oatmeal. They're just not much different than ordinary instant oatmeals, despite their claims:

Reduces or removes cholesterol. Eating 1½ cups of *any* oatmeal every day could shave your cholesterol by 3 to 5 percent. That's not huge, but it doesn't hurt.

Supports healthy arteries. “Supports” is your clue that the claim is shaky. There's little evidence that the white tea, green tea, and

grape seed extract in Heart to Heart do anything for your arteries. Ditto for both cereals' added vitamins (B-6, B-12, C, E, and folic acid).

Reduces the risk of high (or helps promote healthy) blood pressure. Both oatmeals have about 100 mg of sodium per serving, which isn't high (though it's 100 mg higher than plain old oatmeal). Their potassium (350 mg in a serving of Take Heart; 230 to 310 mg in a serving of Heart to Heart) comes from their oats plus added potassium chloride. While it might help lower your blood pressure, it won't put much of a dent in your daily potassium target (4,700 mg).

Omega-3 ALA to help support a healthy heart. The omega-3 fats in fish oil protect the heart. It's not clear whether the omega-3 fat ALA (alpha-linolenic acid) does as well. But even if ALA were magic, a serving of Take Heart has only 130 mg. You'd get more in just a *teaspoon* of soybean oil (400 mg) or canola oil (300 mg).



Photos: Kashi (Heart to Heart), Nick Waring (Weight Control).

When You're Hot...

Our Best Bites (✓✓) are 100% whole grain, contain no added sugar (some have naturally occurring sugar from their fruit or a smidgen of sugar from their grain), have no more than 100 milligrams of sodium per serving, and are free of the poorly tested artificial sweetener acesulfame potassium. Within each section, cereals are ranked from most to least fiber, then least to most sugar, calories, and sodium.

Hot Cereal

Non-Instant Cereal <i>(40 grams dry, about 1 cup cooked, unless noted)</i>	Calories	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)#	Sodium (mg)
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Organic High Fiber (45 g)	150	10	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill 7 Grain (41 g)	140	6	1	0
✓✓ Mother's Oat Bran	150	6	1	0
✓✓ Hodgson Mill Multi Grain	160	6	1	0
✓✓ McCann's Irish Oat Bran (33 g)	110	5	0	0
✓✓ Country Choice Organic Multi Grain	130	5	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Cracked Wheat—Organic or regular	140	5	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Rolled Wheat	140	5	0	0
✓✓ Old Wessex Ltd. 5 Grain	140	5	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill 10 Grain (46 g)	140	5	0	10
✓✓ Wheatena (41 g)	160	5	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill 5 Grain (35 g)	120	5	1	0
✓✓ Bear Naked 100% Organic Medley	160	5	1	0
✓✓ Cream of Wheat Whole Grain (33 g)*	100	4	0	90
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Organic Kamut	120	4	0	0
✓✓ Mother's Whole Wheat	130	4	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Scottish Oatmeal—Organic or regular (36-40 g)	140	4	0	0
✓✓ McCann's Irish Oatmeal—Steel Cut or Quick & Easy Steel Cut	150	4	0	0
✓✓ McCann's Quick Cooking Irish Oatmeal	150	4	0	0
✓✓ Old Wessex Ltd.—Scottish Style Porridge Oats or Organic or regular Irish Style Oatmeal	150	4	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Whole Wheat Farina—Organic or regular (45 g)	160	4	0	0
✓✓ Erewhon Organic Barley Plus (47 g)	170	4	0	0
✓✓ Quaker—Old Fashioned or Quick Oats	150	4	1	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Spice N' Nice (44 g)	190	4	3	10
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Muesli (31 g)	110	4	5	0
✓✓ Hodgson Mill Apples & More Muesli (35 g)	150	4	5	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Organic Creamy Buckwheat (41 g)	140	3	0	0
✓✓ Lundberg Purely Organic Rice Cereal (45 g)	150	3	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Apple, Cinnamon & Grains (45 g)	110	3	2	10
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Grains & Nuts (44 g)	110	2	0	0
Quaker Quick Grits (37 g)*	130	2	0	0
✓✓ Arrowhead Mills—Bear Mush or Organic Rice & Shine (42-43 g)	150	2	0	0
✓✓ Bob's Red Mill Creamy Rice—Organic or regular (41 g)	150	2	0	10
Farina Mills Farina Original (33 g)*	120	1	0	0
Cream of Wheat 2 1/2 Minute (33 g)*	120	1	0	90

Calories
Fiber (g)
Sugar (g)#
Sodium (mg)

Malt-O-Meal Original (35 g)*	130	1	0	0
✓✓ Erewhon Organic Brown Rice Cream (45 g)	170	1	0	30
Cream of Rice (46 g)*	170	0	0	0

Instant Oatmeal (1 packet)

Quaker High Fiber (45 g) ^{1*}	160	10 ^F	7	240
Dr. McDougall's cups—Organic or regular (66-86 g) ¹	280	7	17	210
Nature's Path Organic Original (50 g)	210	6	0	160
Quaker Weight Control (45 g) ^{1*}	160	6 ^F	1 ^A	280
Kashi GoLean (40 g) ¹	150	6 ^F	7	100
Quaker Take Heart (45 g) ^{1*}	160	6 ^F	9	110
✓✓ Uncle Sam (34 g)*	130	5	0	20
Uncle Sam with Soymilk (41-42 g) ^{1*}	160	5	8	60
Nature's Path Organic—FlaxPlus or HempPlus (40-50 g) ¹	190	5	8	120
Kashi Heart to Heart (43 g) ^{1*}	160	5 ^F	13	100
✓✓ Erewhon Organic with Added Oat Bran (35 g)	130	4	0	0
✓✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic Original (40 g)	150	4	0	0
Trader Joe's Oatmeal Complete (40 g)*	170	4	2	40
Dr. McDougall's Organic Light (30-38 g) ^{1*}	140	4	6	150
Weil by Nature's Path Organic (40 g) ¹	160	4 ^F	9	90
Quaker Simple Harvest (42 g) ¹	160	4	10	80
Nature's Path Organic, except Original (50 g) ¹	200	4	13	110
Quaker Oatmeal Express (54 g) ^{1*}	200	4	18	290
✓✓ Quaker Organic Regular (28 g)	100	3	0	0
✓✓ Quaker Original (28 g)*	100	3	0	80
McCann's Irish Sugar Free (28 g)*	100	3	0 ^A	140
✓✓ Dr. McDougall's Organic Original (28 g)*	120	3	0	40
McCann's Irish Regular Flavor (28 g)*	100	3	1	80
✓✓ Country Choice Organic Original (29 g)	110	3	1	0
Quaker Lower Sugar (31-35 g) ^{1*}	120	3	5	230
Erewhon Organic, except with Added Oat Bran (34-35 g) ¹	130	3	5	100
Nature's Path Organic—Optimum Power or Optimum Zen (40 g) ¹	150	3	10	140
Country Choice Organic, except Original (36-43 g) ¹	160	3	10	60
Whole Foods 365 Organic, except Original (40 g) ¹	150	3	13	130
Quaker, except Original (35-46 g) ^{1*}	150	3	13	230
✓✓ Arrowhead Mills Organic Original Plain (28 g)	110	2	0	0
McCann's Irish, except Regular Flavor (35-43 g) ^{1*}	140	2	12	180

Frozen Cereal (1 package)

Amy's Organic Bowls Multi-Grain (255 g)	190	5	12	300
Amy's Organic Bowls Rolled Oats (255 g)	220	5	14	220
Amy's Organic Bowls Steel-Cut Oats (255 g)	220	5	15	190
Trader Joe's Steelcut Oatmeal (227 g)	150	4	7	40
Amy's Organic Bowls Cream of Rice (255 g)	170	2	8	220

✓✓ Best Bite. * Cereal is fortified or enriched with vitamins or minerals. ¹ Average. ^F Number includes added isolated fiber. ^A Cereal contains acesulfame potassium. # Number includes added sugar plus naturally occurring sugar from fruit and grains.

Daily Limits (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Fiber:** at least 25 grams. **Sugar:** 40 grams. **Sodium:** 1,500 milligrams.

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