

## Effects of Serving High-Sugar Cereals on Children's Breakfast-Eating Behavior

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**OBJECTIVES** To test (1) whether children will consume low-sugar ready-to-eat (RTE) cereals and (2) the effects of serving high- versus low-sugar cereals on the consumption of cereal, refined sugar, fresh fruit, and milk.

**PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS** Using an experimental design, we randomly assigned children ( $n = 91$ ) who were attending summer day camp to receive a breakfast that included either the choice of 1 of 3 high-sugar cereals (high-sugar condition) or low-sugar cereals (low-sugar condition), as well as low-fat milk, orange juice, bananas, strawberries, and sugar packets. Participants served themselves and completed a background questionnaire after eating. Researchers measured the amount and calories consumed of each food.

**RESULTS** In both conditions, children reported "liking" or "loving" the cereal they chose. Children in the low-sugar cereal condition consumed, on average, slightly more than 1 serving of cereal (35 g), whereas children in the high-sugar condition consumed significantly more (61 g) and almost twice the amount of refined sugar in total (24.4 vs 12.5 g). Milk and total calories consumed did not differ significantly between conditions, but children in the low-sugar condition were more likely to put fruit on their cereal (54% vs 8%) and consumed a greater portion of total calories from fresh fruit (20% vs 13%).

**CONCLUSIONS** Compared with serving low-sugar cereals, high-sugar cereals increase children's total sugar consumption and reduce the overall nutritional quality of their breakfast. Children will consume low-sugar cereals when offered, and they provide a superior breakfast option.

**Key Words:** obesity • children • food marketing • cereal • breakfast • nutrition

**Abbreviations:** RTE = ready-to-eat

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