

## Less sugar, equal taste from healthy cereal

By Alison McCook

**NEW YORK** | Mon Dec 13, 2010 4:17pm GMT

(Reuters Health) - Kids who start the day with a bowl of sugary cereal are consuming almost twice the sugar they would take in eating healthier options -- which, incidentally, they would be just as happy with, a new study finds.

Specifically, kids served sugary cereal poured themselves more than 24 grams of refined sugar. Those given low-sugar cereals were more likely to reach for table sugar, but still consumed about half the amount of sugar overall -- and more fruit.

Plus, kids who ate either sugary or low-sugar cereals were equally likely to say they enjoyed their breakfast.

"Children will consume low-sugar cereals when offered, and they provide a superior breakfast option," Jennifer Harris at Yale University and her colleagues write in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Too much sugar not only contributes to obesity, but is a key culprit in diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association, which recommends that women eat no more than 25 grams -- about 6 teaspoons -- of added sugar a day, and men no more than 37.5 grams. Added sugars are any that don't occur naturally in a food.

Sugary, ready-to-eat cereals -- quick meals that require no cooking -- have long been considered a major culprit in the war against poor diets. A 2008 analysis found that breakfast cereals for children are less healthy than cereals meant for adults, and those marketed most aggressively to kids have the worst nutritional quality.

Last week, General Mills announced it was reducing the sugar content of its 11 cereals advertised to children. The step-down in sugar by the maker of Lucky Charms, Cocoa Puffs and Trix cereals is a move closer to the company's year-old goal of reducing to single-digit levels the number of grams of sugar per serving in all of its cereals advertised to children under 12.

But many cereals are already relatively low in sugar. To test how kids respond to both cereal types, Harris and her colleagues observed 91 children between the ages of 5 and 12 as they helped themselves to cereals at summer day camp. Those given sugary cereals had the option of Froot Loops, Cocoa Pebbles or Frosted Flakes. Kids who could only choose between low-sugar options had their pick of Cheerios, Rice Krispies and Corn Flakes. In both groups, kids could help themselves to milk, fruit, juice and sugar packets.

Recording what the kids ate, the authors found that those given sugary options poured themselves approximately 2 servings' worth, while those eating low-sugar cereals stuck to a little more than 1 serving. Both groups consumed roughly the same amount of milk and orange juice, as well as total calories. But approximately one-quarter of total calories from sugary cereals came from refined sugar, which supplied only 14 percent of calories from

low-sugar options -- even though many kids eating healthier cereals helped themselves to extra table sugar.

And more than half of kids given low-sugar options added fruit to their bowls, versus 8 percent of those eating sugary cereal.

When the authors asked the kids how much they liked the different brands of cereals, kids rated the sugary cereals higher. But when asked to rate their breakfast after eating it, both groups of kids rated their sugary or low-sugar cereals equally highly.

"This result suggests that a parent who is concerned that a child will not eat enough of a low-sugar cereal in the morning could provide a small amount of table sugar (eg, 1 tsp) as well as fresh fruit for the child to add to the cereal," Harris and her team write.

Celeste Clark, Senior Vice President Global Public Policy and External Relations and Chief Sustainability Officer at Kellogg Company, which sells some of the sugary and low-sugar cereals used in this study, said that, like General Mills, Kellogg has recently decreased the sugar in its top-selling kids' cereals by approximately 20 percent, or 2-3 grams per serving.

Cereal remains a healthy part of kids' breakfasts, Clark said in an e-mail to Reuters Health. "When you consider that an average serving of cereal with milk, at only 150 calories, is the leading source of 10 nutrients in the diet of U.S. children, cereal ranks as one of the best breakfast choices available," she added. "Research shows that all cereal eaters have healthier body weights than those who don't eat cereal."

Post Foods, which sells the other sugary cereal used in the study, did not comment.

SOURCE: [link.reuters.com/jud89q](http://link.reuters.com/jud89q) Pediatrics, online December 13, 2010.