

What's the Scoop on Cereal?

Source: USA-Swimming Official Website

So many options...how do you choose?

For swimmers, cereal is great just about any time of the day. Competitive athletes are encouraged to choose nutrient dense cereals, which contain more of the right kinds of nutrients (carbohydrate, protein, vitamins, minerals) per serving than their "candy cereal" counterparts. More bang for the buck, so to speak.

Generally speaking, the best cereals are high-carbohydrate (>25 grams/serving), moderate-protein (5-10 grams/serving), low-fat (<5 grams/serving), and moderate-fiber (2-4 grams/serving). Most cereals on the market today, including "candy cereal," are fortified with vitamins and minerals, such that one serving usually provides 20-100% of a given vitamin or mineral. However, these values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet, which is well below the energy requirements for most competitive swimmers in their teens and twenties.

Consider cereals in three categories: High Nutrient Density, Moderate Nutrient Density, and Low Density (aka "candy cereal"). Athletes looking for a good cereal but not a whole lot of calories, a Moderate Nutrient Density product is best. For those looking for density (i.e. lots more nutrients/calories in a smaller serving), then a High Nutrient Density cereal is the way to go. Swimmers looking for "candy cereal" should be encouraged to save this type of product for weekends and/or limited occasions. The following table offers a non-exhaustive list of cereals in each of the categories mentioned above:

High Nutrient Density Cereals >30 grams carb >4 grams protein <40% of carbohydrate is sugar	Moderate Nutrient Density Cereals 20-30 grams carbohydrate 2-4 grams protein <40% of carbohydrate is sugar	Low Nutrient Density ("candy") Cereals >40% of carbohydrate is sugar
Quaker Toasted Oatmeal Raisin Bran Smart Start Blueberry Morning Basic Four Wheaties Energy Crunch Raisin Nut Bran Honey Nut Shredded Wheat	Cheerios Team Cheerios Rice Crispies Corn Flakes Special K Total	Fruit Loops Cinnamon Toast Crunch Captain Crunch Cocoa Puffs Fruitie Pebbles Frosted Flakes

And of course, hot oatmeal and granola are always excellent choices. And all dry cereals make a great snack to take on the road. Just toss 1 cup into a plastic storage bag or air-tight container, and off you go. The point is to find a cereal that tastes good and also meets your nutritional needs. With all the products on the market, no swimmer should have any problem doing just that.