Introduction. The nutritional quality of ready-to-eat cereals (RTE) advertised to children has improved greatly under self-regulation. Participants in the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), an advertising self-regulation program operated by the Council of Better Business Bureaus, have reduced sugars, calories or sodium and increased the whole grains, fiber, and/or vitamins and minerals content of cereals that they advertise to children.

On December 31, 2013 CFBAI’s new uniform nutrition criteria for foods advertised to children went into effect. These criteria include a no-more-than-10-grams-of-total-sugars-per-serving criterion for cereals (with a one-ounce serving size), which resulted in further improvements in this food category. While reducing the sugar content of cereals has been a key objective, the overall nutritional content of cereals is important. This snapshot, which reports on the nutrition content of 24 RTE cereals on CFBAI’s January 2014 product list, shows that the calories, sodium and fats of participants’ cereals are modest and that overall the nutritional density has improved.¹

For more information about CFBAI, visit http://www.bbb.org/us/CFBAI.

Sugars and other nutrients to limit are modest in cereals advertised to children

The participants’ cereals contain a modest amount of calories and sodium and little or no saturated or trans fats.

- **Calories.** Twenty-three cereals have labeled serving sizes in the one-ounce range (27-33 grams). All of them contain no more than 130 calories and 39% contain no more than 110 calories. One cereal has a 54-gram serving size and contains 190 calories.
- **Trans fat.** All 24 cereals have 0 grams of trans fat.
- **Saturated fat.** None of the 24 cereals exceed 1 gram, 88% contain no more than 0.5 grams and 58% contain 0 grams. All contain less than 10% of calories from saturated fat.
- **Sodium.** None of the 24 cereals contain more than 190 mg sodium, and 75% contain no more than 170 mg.

Today, all cereals with a one-ounce serving size that the participants may advertise to children have no more than 10 grams of sugar per serving.² Many have even less. (See Table 1.) Now 52% have no more than 9 grams per serving and more than 20% have no more than 8 grams per serving. Before CFBAI started, some cereals advertised to children had 15 or 16 grams of sugar per serving. On a percentage-of-weight basis, nearly 80% (19/24) contain no more than 35% sugar, and 42% (10/24) contain no more than 30% sugar.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Sugar Content of Cereals 2009 to March 2014</th>
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<td>≤ 9 grams</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>16%</td>
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<td>73%</td>
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¹ For more information about CFBAI, visit http://www.bbb.org/us/CFBAI.

² Today, all cereals with a one-ounce serving size that the participants may advertise to children have no more than 10 grams of sugar per serving.
Cereals advertised to children are rich in positive nutrients

Today 67% (16/24) of the cereals list whole grains as the first ingredient in the ingredients statement, more than twice the percentage compared to fall 2012. Most (71%) contain at least 8 grams of whole grains, 50% contain at least 12 grams (a 44% increase from May 2013), and nearly 30% contain more than 12 grams. (See Table 2.)

The participants’ cereals also contain at least a “good” source of nutrients that the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans call “nutrients of public health concern.” All contain at least a “good” source of one nutrient of concern and 50% (12/24) are a “good” source of two of these nutrients.

- Calcium. 50% of the cereals (a 39% increase from May 2013) are a “good” source.
- Vitamin D. All but two are a “good” source and 25% are an “excellent” source.
- Fiber. 17% are at least a “good” source.

Cereals meeting CFBAI’s criteria can contribute to a healthy diet

Research shows that children who eat RTE cereal, presweetened or non-presweetened, tend to have healthier body weights than those who do not eat cereal. For example, a 2013 study confirmed the positive association between RTE cereal consumption in children and healthier body weights compared to children who skip breakfast or eat a different breakfast.

Looking ahead. In 2014, the cereals that CFBAI participants advertise to children are very different than those advertised just a few years ago. The new CFBAI criteria, which have driven improvements in cereals, will be reviewed after the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans are issued. At that time, CFBAI will consider whether the criteria should be changed or further strengthened.

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1 This Snapshot updates the May 2013 Snapshot, reflecting implementation of CFBAI’s nutrition criteria, and other changes. The changes reported reflect both differences in what cereals are listed and improvements in cereals already on the list.

2 CFBAI’s criteria permit cereals with a larger serving size to contain no more than 12 grams of sugar per serving. One cereal on CFBAI’s list that has a 54-gram serving size contains 11 grams of sugar per serving.

3 The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2010 DGA) advise that half of all grains consumed be whole grains (at p.36). The 2010 DGA also consider 8 grams to be a significant amount. According to the 2010 DGA, “[w]hole grains are a source of nutrients, such as iron, magnesium, selenium, B vitamins, and dietary fiber. Whole grains vary in their dietary fiber content. . . . Consuming enough whole grains helps meet nutrient needs. Choosing whole grains that are higher in dietary fiber has additional health benefits.” 1d.

4 A “good” source contains 10 to 19% of the government-established Daily Value (DV) for a particular nutrient. An “excellent” source contains at least 20% DV.

5 K. Miller, et al., The Association Between Body Metrics and Breakfast Food Choice in Children, INFANT, CHILD & ADOLESCENT NUTRITION (Feb. 2013) (the study defined presweetened cereals as ≥ 9 grams sugar per serving); see also A.M. Albertson et al., The Relationship between Ready-to-Eat Cereal Consumption Categorized by Sugar Content and Body Measures in American Children: Results from NHANES 2001-06, 23 FASEB J. 550.22 (April 2009) (Meeting Abstracts); A.M. Albertson et al., Ready-to-Eat Cereal Consumption: Its Relationship with BMI and Nutrient Intake of Children aged 4 to 12 years, J AM DIET ASSOC. 103.12 (2003): 1613-1619.