

## We Need to Call American Breakfast What It Often Is: Dessert

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In America, breakfast is often nothing more than disguised dessert, as this tweet from author and researcher Alan Levinovitz reminded us: Dessert translations of breakfast foods: muffin = cupcake; smoothie = milkshake; granola = streusel top; yogurt = ice cream; waffle = cookie.

Look no further than the menu at IHOP, where dessert for breakfast reigns. You can find such items as New York cheesecake pancakes or raspberry white chocolate chip pancakes, which come with a whopping 83 grams (nearly 21 teaspoons) of sugar. Remember that the government recommends no more than 12 teaspoons of sugar per person per day (though the average American consumes 23.)

But you don't need to go to IHOP to get a day's worth of sugar in your morning meal. The muffins that greet us in the bakery aisle and at the coffee shop can contain about 37 grams of sugar—or a little more than 9 teaspoons.

And yogurt? The fermented dairy product has the patina of a health food, thanks to its protein and beneficial bacteria.

5 Yet companies like Yoplait and Chobani have built yogurt empires in America by saturating their products with sugar. Yoplait recently lowered the sugar in its classic 6-ounce strawberry yogurt from 26 grams to 18 grams (4.5 teaspoons), but that's still more than the 15 grams you'll get in a standard brownie.

And if you believe granola is any healthier, think again.

A fascinating story from *The New York Times's* Upshot blog looked at the results of a poll that asked nutritionists about their perceptions of the healthfulness of popular foods and compared their answers with those of the general public.

“No food elicited a greater difference of opinion between experts and the public than granola bars,” wrote *Times* reporters Kevin Quealy and Margot Sanger Katz. “About 70 percent of Americans called it healthy, but less than 30 percent of nutritionists did.”

Granola didn't fare much better. Less than half of the nutritionists described the crunchy food, made popular by hippies, as healthy.

10 The main reason nutritionists worry about granola: Most of it is deceptively high in calories and sugar, particularly in the quantities people are likely to eat. According to CSPI, many granola brands pack at least 200 calories in each serving—and servings are usually listed as half a cup. (For some brands, a serving

is only a quarter-cup—or a measly 4 tablespoons.) Many people eat much more than that in one sitting, which means you could be getting 600 calories or more from one bowl.

Let's not forget cereal, which continues to find new ways to hide lots of sugar behind healthy-sounding labels.

Numerous reports from health advocates like the Environmental Working Group have pointed out the gratuitous amount of sugar in the usual suspects like Lucky Charms and Honey Smacks.

But then you have Cheerios Protein, a variation on the classic but with added protein. "A serving of Cheerios Protein, with its four teaspoons of sugar, has much more sugar than a typical cereal marketed to kids, such as Trix or Frosted Flakes," said Michael Jacobson, president of CSPI, in a statement. "They really ought to call the product Cheerios Sugar." Meanwhile, a serving of Honey Nut Cheerios contains more sugar than three Chips Ahoy cookies.

Crushed-up cookies in a bowl: That's how many cereals really should be viewed.

### **Breakfast doesn't have to be dessert**

There are many cereals that look and taste nothing like dessert—with plenty of fiber to fill you up and little or no added sugar, as food policy and nutrition researcher Marion Nestle has noted. (A helpful ranking of cereals according to their healthfulness is available from the Food Advertising to Children and Teens Score project.) 15

Similarly, some yogurts are far healthier than others. I've written about Siggi's, an Icelandic yogurt that was created in response to the overly sweet options on offer in US supermarkets. Every serving has about 100 calories and 25 to 50 percent less sugar than mainstream brands. Plain yogurts from any brand are a safe bet, and it's always a good idea to steer clear of yogurts with names like Key lime pie and Philly cheesecake.

Eggs, particularly when served with vegetables, are a dependable, nutrient-rich option. They're also satiating, thanks to their protein and fat. A less satiating breakfast is going to be low fat, low protein, and high sugar—like a low-fat muffin.

Or maybe you want to try something completely different. Though sweet foods (or egg-based meals) have become synonymous with breakfast in the US, people in some countries branch out much further.

In Japan, for example, breakfast will often include a hearty mix of fish, rice, and miso soup. Lots of filling protein, vitamins, and minerals, with no cookies in a bowl or sugar-loaded dairy.

And don't forget: Not everyone necessarily has to eat breakfast. That's a myth that was mostly cooked up by the makers of sugary desserts—I mean, breakfasts—outlined here. 20