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COLD CEREAL IS ONE OF THE HOTTEST ITEMS ON THE MENU

The breakfast favorite is inspiring everything from chic new restaurants to sleepover snacks

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) Monday, December 7, 2015 - A century and a half after cold breakfast cereal was invented, its popularity is hitting new heights in the United States. Cereal-themed restaurants have opened in several states including New York, Virginia and Texas, and a growing number of people are hosting cereal bar parties in their homes.

"It's a new spin on an age-old breakfast favorite," said [Karen Bakies](#), a registered dietitian and the nutrition affairs director for the [American Dairy Association Mideast](#), headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. "The great thing is, cereal is so versatile, you can eat it anytime and create dishes that are fun and simple for the kids, or incorporate herbs and seasonings to make something very complex and savory for adults."

Recipes range from more traditional combinations of cereal, fruits and low-fat milk - to pairing certain cereals with flavored milk or yogurt, and topping it with lemon rinds, thyme or even chili powder. "There's really no wrong combination," said Bakies. "Cereal bars are a lot like salad bars. There are a lots of ingredients to choose from, but each person comes up with their own creation depending on their individual taste."

It's a concept that appeals to Kym Greene, of Galena, Ohio, who recently hosted her first cereal party for her two sons and two of their friends. "It was great," said Greene. "As a family, we strive to eat healthy every day, and this gave us another fun, new alternative," she said. "Instead of snacking on pizza or chips and soda, we set up a huge spread of healthy ingredients and let the kids create whatever they wanted. They really got into it."

But beyond allowing parents to control the nutritional value of the ingredients, Bakies say cereal bars can also provide parents with a teaching opportunity. "They're a great way to engage your child and get them thinking about the choices they make," she said. "Kids are more likely to eat what they make, and when given a wide range of choices, they're often open to trying new things - healthy things - they might not have eaten otherwise."

Here are a few idea for hosting your own healthy cereal bar party:

Use whole grains as basic building blocks - Whole grain cereals, like toasted oats, multi-grain, bran and even a lightly sweetened whole grain cereals. Choose cereals that pair well with a variety of spices, fruits and natural sweeteners.

Use a variety of milks and yogurt - Cold cereal and low-fat milk are a classic combination, but think outside the bowl! Offer flavored milks and yogurts or Greek yogurt at your cereal bar to change things up. A popular dish with the kids is an upside down cereal bowl - in which they fill a glass bowl with cereal and toppings first, then top it off with yogurt. You can also make banana splits - by halving a banana, putting three dollops of low-fat, flavored yogurt in the middle, then sprinkling cereal on as a topping.

Don't cut out all the sweets - Whether you are serving children or adults, don't do away with all the sweets. Instead, offer healthier, natural sweeteners, like pure maple syrup, coconut shavings or honey.

Use a variety of bowls and dishes - Glass bowls are particularly fun for children, so they can see all the ingredients as they are added. But, you may also want to offer a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Some hosts use small juice glasses or sundae dishes so guests can make several smaller concoctions instead of one large one.

Spice things up - Spices are often used in cereal bars created for adults. Offer your guests cinnamon, thyme, chili powder and mint. Sweet and spicy combinations make for a savory dish, so include items from your spice rack and see what your guests can create.

For more ideas and cereal bar recipes, go to www.drink-milk.com.

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