



## Take care when choosing snack bar

**I recently tried a new brand of granola bar and was surprised at how sweet it was — it was almost like eating a candy bar. What should I look for on the label when trying another kind?**

Not surprisingly, granola bars are a lot like breakfast cereals in that they are all over the board when it comes to sugar content and overall nutrition.

Just as you wouldn't reach for any box of cereal and assume it was a healthful choice, don't try doing the same with granola bars (or breakfast bars, or energy bars, or protein bars, any type of similar snack bars). Like other packaged foods, read the label so you know what you're getting.

To make the best choices and keep things simple at the same time, nutrition professionals recommend focusing on just a few items on the Nutrition Facts label when it comes to either breakfast cereals or their rectangular block equivalents: calories, fat, fiber and sugar.

• **Calories.** Take just a quick look at the Nutrition Facts and you'll see that calorie counts vary widely on snack bars. Some have fewer than 100 calories (though they tend to be smaller than others on the shelf — just compare the weight of the bar, listed next to the serving size). Some specialty or gourmet bars have 300 calories or more — as much as a small meal.

• **Fat.** Look in particular at saturated fat and trans fat — the lower the counts, the better. Total fat often ranges from 2 to 4 grams, although bars packed full of almonds or other nuts generally have more total fat, along with a good supply of healthier polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats.

• **Fiber.** Fiber ranges wildly in breakfast bars. Some have just 1 gram of fiber; others might have 9 or 10 grams. Most Americans don't get nearly the 21 to 36 grams of fiber they should consume every day (the exact amount recommended for you depends on your recommended calorie intake). In any case, a high-fiber snack bar obviously would be a better choice.

• **Sugars.** Again, sugar content varies widely. Some bars have less than 6 grams of sugar; others have more than 12. Most Americans get too much added sugar; choose a breakfast bar with less rather than more.

Taking a good look at the ingredients listing also can help you choose a better bar. Ingredients are listed according to weight, with those weighing the most listed first. So, avoid bars with sugar (or high fructose corn syrup, brown rice syrup, malitol or other types of sweetener) listed near the top. Look instead for whole grains, such as oats, or nuts or peanut butter near the top of the list.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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