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**A Short History of Cereal**

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Photo

Credit Frederic Hamilton/Hulton Archive, via Getty Images

An American invention, breakfast cereal began as a digestive aid, acquired religious overtones, became a sugary snack and now toggles between health food and sweet indulgence. Throughout that history, it has mirrored changes in the world beyond the breakfast table. Here are some highlights.

1. Photo

John Harvey Kellogg Credit The New York Times

Mid to Late 19th Century﻿

In 1863, James Caleb Jackson, a religiously conservative vegetarian who ran a medical sanitarium in western New York, created a breakfast cereal from graham flour dough that was dried and broken into shapes so hard they needed to be soaked in milk overnight. He called it granula. John Harvey Kellogg, a surgeon who ran a health spa in Michigan, later made a version and named it granola. Using the same idea, a former Kellogg patient, C.­W. Post, created Grape-Nuts, which would become the first popular product to offer a discount coupon.

1. Photo

1900s

Kellogg and his younger brother, Will Keith Kellogg, had figured out how to make a flaked cereal they called Corn Flakes. The younger Kellogg added sugar and began mass-marketing them, including the first in-box prize. Post developed a similar cereal called Elijah’s Manna, which he later renamed Post Toasties after religious groups protested.

1. Photo

1910s

The Quaker Oats Company, which had acquired a method of forcing rice grains to explode under pressure, began marketing Puffed Rice and Puffed Wheat as a breakthrough in food science, calling them the first “food shot from guns” and “the eighth wonder of the world.”

1. Photo

1920s

A health clinician accidentally spilled a wheat bran mixture onto a hot stove, creating what would come to be called Wheaties. (Its famous slogan, “Breakfast of Champions,” would first appear on a billboard for a minor league baseball team in Minnesota in the 1930s.) Rice Krispies, with its characters Snap, Crackle and Pop, soon became a close rival.

1. Photo

1930s

The Ralston Purina company introduced an early version of Wheat Chex, calling it Shredded Ralston. It was intended to feed followers of Ralstonism, a strict, racist social movement that included a belief in controlling the minds of others. (The name Chex, a rice version and the first recipe for Chex Mix would not arrive until the 1950s. And yes, that’s Elizabeth Taylor on this ’50s box.)

1. Photo

1940s

Cheerios appeared as CheeriOats but were quickly renamed. (They would become the best-selling cereal in America, worth about $1 billion in sales in 2015. Honey Nut Cheerios, introduced by General Mills in 1979, is the brand’s most popular version.)

1. Photo

1950s

After World War II, cereal consumption increased with the advent of the baby boom, and sugar became a selling point. Kellogg’s invented Frosted Flakes and its pitchman, Tony the Tiger, and a new era of television advertising began. (Tony shared mascot’s duty for the brand with other characters including Katy the Kangaroo, but they were later phased out.)

1. Photo

1960s

Quisp, a pink-skinned alien in a green jumpsuit, became a madly popular character for the space age. He fought his rival, the miner Quake, in a series of commercials. Like Cap’n Crunch, another Quaker product from this decade, the cereals were essentially sweetened corn and oat dough formulated into different shapes. Quake was discontinued, but the saucer-shaped Quisp has been resuscitated periodically, and memorabilia remains in demand.

1. Photo

1970s

The heyday of fruit-flavored and monster cereals filled children’s bowls with Count Chocula, Franken Berry and Boo Berry, General Mills products that still enjoy cultlike followings. Post’s Fruity Pebbles and Cocoa Pebbles were competitors in a decade when the Federal Trade Commission began taking a harder look at how cereal companies marketed their products to children, and when granola began its commercial comeback.

1. Photo

1980s

Co-branding cereal was the game. Mr. T had his own, made from sweetened corn and oats and shaped like a T. (In advertisements, he pitied the fool who didn’t eat it.) Donkey Kong, Smurf-Berry Crunch and Cabbage Patch Kids cereals also appeared, along with the California Raisins, the claymation quartet that promoted Post Raisin Bran.

1. Photo

1990s

Puffins, a molasses-sweetened corn cereal with roots in a small Northern California natural foods bakery, debuted as organic food went mainstream and parents increasingly searched out more healthful cereals. Gorilla Munch, an organic cereal that is part of Nature’s Path EnviroKidz line, soon followed.

1. Photo

2000s

The battle of the virtuous cereals was on. Kellogg’s acquired the Kashi line, just one sign of the exploding market for natural and organic foods. These cereals also became targets for consumers demanding more transparency in labeling and more products without genetically modified or artificial ingredients. The current decade has been all about labeling. Cereals started being promoted as free of genetically modified organisms and gluten, or as containing specific nutrients. Even cereals like Dora the Explorer started selling themselves as whole grain.