

A balanced breakfast builds a better student

Your mother was right—breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Many studies have shown that children who eat breakfast show improved concentration and problem-solving skills. Proper nutrition fuels the brain and gives children the energy needed to keep them going throughout the day.

This is especially important for our children as they head back to school. We want our children to be more alert, in good humour, and ready to participate in learning activities.

Despite the advantages of eating breakfast, many children (and adults) admit they often skip breakfast. The reasons vary—they believe they don't have

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PARENTING POINTS

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enough time, they aren't hungry, or they just don't like breakfast foods.

In actuality, the most common reason kids may not eat is that there may not be a parent nearby at breakfast time. They need

encouragement to eat and help to put together a quick, easy breakfast.

Some kids skip breakfast because they sleep too late or because they think it's a way to stay slim. According to a 2007 study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, children who eat breakfast tend to have healthier weights than children who skip breakfast. Most children who skip breakfast snack on less nutritious, high-fat foods later in the day. As a result, they have more trouble maintaining a healthy weight.

The following tips will help you encourage your children to dig into a healthy breakfast before they head out the door for school or day care.

- **Take time to eat with your children.**

This models healthy eating habits and fuels your body so that you are better prepared to tackle your day.

- **Have quick, easy to prepare breakfast items available**—instant oatmeal, ready-to-eat cereals, fresh fruit, or juices, mini-bagels, muffins, toast, yogurt, string cheese, and milk.

- **Set the table the night before.**

Seeing the bowl, spoon, and cereal on the table reminds your child that she will be eating breakfast.

- **Some children may prefer foods not traditionally served for breakfast.**

Sandwiches—grilled cheese, turkey, or peanut butter and jelly—or leftovers like pizza, tacos, a stuffed baked potato, rice or noodles, still make a healthy, balanced breakfast when paired with a glass of juice or low-fat milk.

- **Healthier food choices stay with your child longer—until they can eat their next snack or meal.**

High-fibre foods such as whole-grain breads and cereals digest more slowly, creating a more stable blood-sugar level and greater staying power. Look for cereals with less than five grams of sugar per serving and aim for five grams of fibre.

- **Limit high sugar cereals and drinks.**

They cause a quick rise in blood sugar

and energy, followed by hunger symptoms within an hour. The same can happen with more traditional, high fat food choices such as bacon, sausage or fried hash browns. They are typically high in fat, cholesterol and salt, so look for lower-fat versions, or consume them in moderation.

- **Plan ahead.**

Use your freezer: make a batch of muffins at the beginning of the week and pull out a few each night to have for breakfast the next day. You can also make your own French toast, waffles, or pancakes and freeze them. When it's time for breakfast, just take them out of the freezer and pop them into the toaster.

Bake up a make-ahead omelette by mixing eggs, cheese, veggies, and other add-ins and pour into muffin cups sprayed with oil. Bake at 350 degrees, about 15-20 minutes, until a knife comes out clean. When done, the omelettes can be frozen and reheated and popped into a pita or other breakfast bread.

Most families would like to spend at least one meal each day eating together. Getting up earlier and turning off the TV can help make eating breakfast together a reality. Even just sitting down a few days a week together around the breakfast table can be the perfect time to check schedules, talk about upcoming events, or just share with each other. A good breakfast can get everyone started on the right foot—nutritionally and emotionally.