
Breakfast Benefits Preschoolers

Preschoolers possess a high level of energy. They are growing and changing at a fast pace. Establishing healthy eating practices, such as eating breakfast everyday, is very important for your preschooler's growth and activity.

Children who start their day with breakfast have fewer behavioral problems. Also, parents, teachers and other school staff have witnessed that children who eat breakfast do better in school. While there is solid information linking school success with breakfast consumption among school age children, are the benefits the same for preschoolers?

Yes! Breakfast has many benefits not only for school age children but for younger children, too. Benefits include improvements in health, reduction in dental caries, better behavior and improved cognitive ability. Consistent breakfast consumption has been associated with healthier weights and better weight maintenance. This is particularly important given that over the past thirty years childhood obesity among preschoolers (children ages 2 through 5) has more than doubled, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Following is a summary of the benefits for eating breakfast. Everyone, from preschoolers to adults, benefit from eating breakfast. Helping your preschooler get into the breakfast "habit" not only helps now, but has long term advantages.

Benefits of Breakfast

Weight

- Eating breakfast may decrease the risk of being overweight in adults and children.
- Adolescents who eat breakfast regularly, at home or school, tend to weigh less and be more active than teenagers who skip breakfast.

Brain Function

- Children who eat breakfast perform better on activities that deal with math, matching, memory, and creativity.



Diet Quality

- Eating breakfast improves the quality of a child's diet.
- Breakfast makes a significant contribution to a child's daily nutrient intake.
- Children who skip breakfast are less likely to meet recommended levels for important nutrients—folic acid, calcium, vitamin A & D.

Dental Health

Skipping breakfast is associated with a higher risk of developing dental caries especially among 2 to 5 year old children.

Behavior

- Children who do NOT eat breakfast show more behavioral problems such as hyperactivity, tardiness, and absence from school.

Many families state that mornings are their most hectic time of the day. Parents are getting ready for work, getting their children ready for preschool, daycare or other activities, and sometimes eating breakfast is more of an afterthought. Here are some easy and quick breakfast ideas.

Yogurt Parfaits
In a small glass or clear plastic cup, layer a scoop of low fat vanilla yogurt with granola cereal and fruit such as berries.
Oatmeal
Cook oatmeal according to package directions using milk instead of water. Add honey, maple syrup or sugar to taste--only if your child prefers it sweetened. Add raisins, nuts or other dried fruit, if desired.
Whole Wheat English Muffin
Toast English muffin and thinly spread with peanut butter. Top with banana slices, raisins or jam. Or toast English muffin and thinly spread with low-fat cottage cheese. Top with fresh fruit (peaches or strawberries).
Breakfast Burrito
Scramble eggs. Add grated cheese and favorite vegetables (tomatoes, green peppers, etc.). Wrap in whole wheat tortilla. No time to scramble eggs? Wrap tortilla around a slice of turkey (or other low-fat deli meat), low fat cheese and chopped veggies.

Ready-to-serve cereals can be a nutritious choice for breakfast if they are low in sugar and high in fiber. Serve with low fat milk and some fruit for a quick breakfast.

Strategies that encourage preschoolers to eat breakfast include:

- Set an example by eating breakfast with your preschooler.
- Involve your preschooler in preparing breakfast.
- Have your preschooler help you set the table the night before and talk about what he may want to have for breakfast when he wakes up.

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- Prepare and offer breakfast items that are colorful and pleasing to the eye.
- Wake your preschooler a few minutes earlier so there is time to eat calmly in the morning.
- Refer to breakfast as morning fuel and talk about how much energy your preschooler will have throughout the day by eating breakfast.
- Expand your definition of breakfast food to include other nutritious food choices such as pizza, soup, quiche, vegetables or even leftovers from dinner.
- If your preschooler is not fond of eating breakfast right after waking up, pack a breakfast to eat a little (not a lot) later.



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