

Children's health, mood and behaviour - the important role of breakfast



This fact sheet talks about the important role that breakfast plays in children – both for their health and development as well as for promoting smart, happy kids. The information comes from Accredited Practising Dietitians with the 'Start Right - Eat Right' Child Care Nutrition Award Scheme Project in South Australia, and is based on the most current scientific evidence.

Why eat breakfast?

Breakfast makes a big difference to a child's diet, as a good breakfast can supply up to 1/3 of a child's daily nutrient needs. A good breakfast usually includes some food from the 'breads & cereal' group, some food from the 'dairy' group and also some fruit.

By including these foods your child is getting:

- carbohydrates for energy for learning and playing
- protein and calcium for building muscles and bones
- fibre for their bowels
- vitamins and minerals to stay healthy

Another great reason to eat breakfast is that regular breakfast eaters have been shown to have lower rates of obesity, lower cholesterol levels and a much better sense of general well being.

Eating breakfast, however, is not just for the health of your child's body. Children who eat breakfast learn and perform better and have improved visual, concentration and thinking abilities – and a good overall diet is associated with a higher IQ.

When children skip breakfast, their mental function declines and some studies have even shown increased rates of depression, anxiety and hyperactivity in children who do not eat breakfast. Eating breakfast will very likely improve your child's mood and ability to learn and play well.

Some great ideas for breakfast for kids...

...in a bowl:

- Breakfast cereal, chopped fruit and milk
- Yoghurt with chopped or stewed fruit
- Porridge with milk and dried/fresh fruit
- Rice porridge with meat or chicken and vegetables
- Moistened muesli with milk or juice, leave in fridge overnight and add yoghurt before serving

...in a flash:

- Tub of fruit yoghurt and a piece of fruit
- Toasted fruit bread or muffin with a glass of milk
- Rice cakes with peanut butter and banana
- Wrap a banana in wholemeal bread or fruit bread
- Wheat flake breakfast biscuits with sliced banana
- Grilled cheese on wholemeal or multigrain toast, cut into fingers

...in a glass:

- Fruit smoothies; just blend milk with fresh, tinned or dried fruit. Try bananas or strawberries
- Flavoured milk or breakfast drinks
- Yoghurt drinks
- Fruit lassies; blend yoghurt and fresh fruit or fruit juice such as mango, rockmelon, berries, banana, apricot

Get children involved – have them squeeze orange juice, set the table or pour the milk.

Finally, remember children are great imitators, so always eat breakfast yourself!