

News Release

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Breakfast: An important start to the school day

The start of the new school year is a good time for parents to look at how their kids are starting their day. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day." This is a familiar saying, but is it really the case? A recent article in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* reviewed 47 studies on eating breakfast and found a great deal of support for this time-honored statement, especially when it comes to young people.

Despite the clear benefits of eating breakfast, breakfast consumption has been declining since the mid-1960s in both children and teens. In fact, teenage girls showed the greatest decline, almost 20 percent. This is rather troubling, given that teens already skip breakfast more than any other age group. On any given day, 30 percent of teens aged 15 to 18 in the U.S. skip breakfast. The numbers for Wisconsin are similar.

There are many reasons why children skip breakfast. Some children aren't hungry first thing in the morning, which can often be the case with middle and high school students. Other reasons children may not eat breakfast include a lack of time or lack of food in the house. Some children may think it will help them manage their weight.

While skipping breakfast may seem like a great way to manage weight, just the opposite is true. In adults, those who skip breakfast tend to be overweight. While there hasn't been much research on this topic in children and teens, the existing research mirrors the finding in adults-that overweight children skip breakfast more frequently than normal or underweight children, especially girls.

Eating breakfast has many benefits for children of all ages, in addition to weight management. Children who eat breakfast are more likely to meet daily nutrient recommendations, especially for calcium, iron, zinc, riboflavin and vitamins A and C. Eating breakfast also affects children's ability to learn, especially children with generally poor diets. Eating breakfast also improves children's moods and increases test scores.

Breakfast doesn't have to be complicated in order for children and teens to reap these benefits. Children who eat ready-to-eat cereal tend to have better quality diets than children who don't eat ready-to-eat cereal. One of the reasons for this is that breakfast cereals are fortified with nutrients and are most often eaten with milk, which provides a number of important vitamins and minerals.

With all of the benefits of eating breakfast, why don't more people eat breakfast on a regular basis? Time and availability appear to be factors. Most people know breakfast is important and many people want to eat breakfast. Not everyone knows how to work it into their day, while others may not have the resources to do so.

Taking advantage of the school breakfast program is one way to save time and ensure your child is starting the day off with a healthy meal. School breakfasts include milk, juice or fruit and an entrée such as cereal or pancakes. All children can participate in the school breakfast program, if it is offered at their school. Some students may also qualify for free or reduced price breakfasts. In 2004-05, 3697 children were enrolled in a school in Manitowoc County offering a breakfast program. This figure increased 39.4% from the 2003-04 school year. An average of 367 students participated in a school breakfast program daily in 2004. Two hundred and thirty-four of the students received free or a reduced priced breakfast meals.

Whether students eat breakfast at home or at school, it is an important part of their morning. As parents and community members, we must work to ensure that all children have a healthy breakfast, if they are to achieve their best throughout the day.

For more information on the School Breakfast Program please contact your child's school or visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/Default.htm>.

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