

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition

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Does Eating Breakfast Cereal Fight Overweight in Children?

It has long been reported that breakfast eating is a good thing – first by moms, then backed up by numerous research studies. Scientists have shown that eating breakfast is important to weight control. Now a new study reveals that the type of breakfast is important in determining positive nutrition and weight outcomes in children and adolescents.

Breakfast eaters, we're told, are more likely to have increased intakes of many nutrients, including vitamins A, E, B-6 and B-12; folate; iron, calcium; phosphorus; magnesium, potassium and dietary fiber. But the positive effects go deeper than simply nutrient totals. Skipping breakfast has been associated with higher body fat levels in children and adolescents. Despite this fact, breakfast skipping is on the rise in this age group. The 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data showed that over 20% of 9- to 13-year-olds and 36% of 14-18-year-olds skip breakfast.

Why is breakfast so important to weight control? There seem to be several ways that eating breakfast affects weight. Breakfast consumption reduces hunger later in the day, making it easier to avoid overeating. The extended fast experienced when breakfast is skipped can increase the body's insulin response, which in turn increases fat storage and weight gain. Plus, skipping breakfast is associated with decreased physical activity.

Researchers reported in the June 2010 *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* that in children and adolescents, breakfast skippers had a higher prevalence of obesity than those who ate breakfast. Among breakfast eaters, those who ate ready-to-eat (RTE) cereal had higher levels of 13 micronutrients, including five shortfall nutrients, than those who skipped breakfast and those who ate other breakfast not including RTE cereal. The five shortfall nutrients – vitamin E, calcium, magnesium, potassium and dietary fiber – were higher in the children and adolescents who ate other

breakfasts than in those who skipped breakfast completely.

Many of those shortfall nutrients are supplied by whole grains, and breakfast is a great time to "make half your grains whole," as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 advise. The opportunities are plentiful for consumers – adults and children alike – to make healthful choices from a variety of whole grain products. These nutritious selections are tasty, widely available and inexpensive – and can be quick to prepare and eat as well. Oatmeal is a breakfast staple for many, and is a whole grain food that is slow to digest, leaving us satisfied longer. It's not just long-cooking oats that are good for us – even instant oatmeal counts as a whole grain food. Many RTE cereals are considered whole grain, and whole grain rolls and bread can be part of a quick, nutritious breakfast.

Want to help your children succeed at school, and be confident that you are supporting their healthy weight? Make breakfast a family priority – for all the right reasons.

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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In each case, credit **Sandy Procter**, PhD, RD, LD, Extension Specialist, Maternal and Child Nutrition and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Coordinator, Department of Human Nutrition; Kansas State University; *Does Eating Breakfast Cereal Fight Overweight in Children?* August 2010.

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