

Breakfast - Strong Bodies, Strong Minds

Fuel Up for Health

Breakfast is a healthy start to a day for everyone. It is especially important for children. Research shows that not only does school breakfast make a difference for health but learning too.



School breakfast participation improves children's nutrition.

- School breakfast participants are more likely to consume diets that are adequate or exceed standards for important vitamins and minerals (e.g., vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, phosphorous).^{1,2,3}
- Children and adolescents who skip breakfast tend to have poorer nutrient intakes than those who eat breakfast.^{4,5,6}
- Eating breakfast regularly has been linked with greater intake of fiber, calcium, iron, vitamin C, and other vitamins and minerals, and lower intake of fat, cholesterol, and sodium.^{7,8}
- Children who participate in school breakfast are more likely to consume fruit and milk at breakfast.⁹



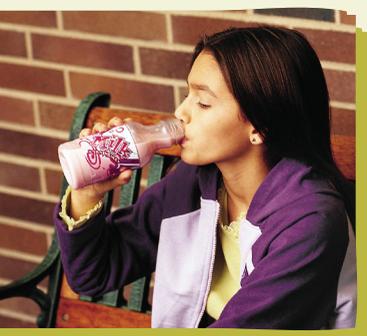
School breakfast may protect against childhood obesity.

- School breakfast participation is associated with a lower body mass index (BMI, an indicator of excess body fat), lower probability of overweight, and lower probability of obesity.^{10,11}
- Participation in federally-funded meals in child care, preschool, school, or summer settings is associated with a lower BMI among young, low-income children.¹²
- Children and adolescents who eat breakfast have more favorable weight-related outcomes (e.g., lower BMI, lower waist circumference, lesser likelihood of being chronically obese) in the short term and long term than those who skip breakfast.^{13,14,15,16,17,18,19}



School breakfast participation protects against other negative health concerns.

- Breakfast skipping among children and adolescents is associated with a number of poor health outcomes and health-compromising behaviors, including higher blood cholesterol and insulin levels, smoking, alcohol use, physical inactivity, disordered eating, and unhealthy weight management practices.^{20,21,22,23}
- School breakfast, including breakfast offered free to all students, has been linked with fewer visits to the school nurse, particularly in the morning.²⁴
- School breakfast participation, especially breakfast offered free to all students, positively impacts children's mental health, including reductions in behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression.^{25,26}



Breakfast in the classroom programs† and programs offering breakfast free to all children in the cafeteria yield other positive results for health and learning.

- Students attending schools that offer a breakfast free to all students are more likely to consume a nutritionally substantive breakfast and to consume significantly more calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, fruit, and dairy products at breakfast, when compared to students from schools with a traditional means-tested school breakfast in the cafeteria program.²⁷
- Children who increase their school breakfast participation as a result of a school breakfast program offered free to all students show improvements in math scores, attendance, punctuality, depression, anxiety, and hyperactivity.²⁸

† Breakfast in the classroom programs are an increasingly popular alternative to traditional before-the-bell, cafeteria-based breakfast programs. Breakfast is brought in from the kitchen in containers that keep dishes at the right temperature, or picked up from carts in the hallways as students enter class. Typically this breakfast is offered free to all students. Such programs boost school breakfast participation and remove the stigma associated with participation.

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