

“Eat your breakfast – It’s the most important meal of the day!” Parents and caregivers from all over the country have tried to get their kids to eat breakfast by making this claim, but is it true? The answer is a resounding YES! Research shows that it is indeed a very important part of maintaining a healthy body.

Breakfast literally means “breaking the fast,” which is how our body gets refueled after going without food all night. The food we eat contains calories. These calories serve as the source of energy our body needs to keep healthy functioning.

- 1) Breakfast replenishes blood sugar. If you eat your evening meal at 7 p.m., it is likely that you are not eating anything else until you wake up in the morning to eat breakfast. This leaves 8 to 12 hours between “refueling.” The body and brain need more food to replenish its blood sugar – glucose. This not only gives your body much needed energy, but it also improves the brain’s ability to function. The morning hours are when your body has its greatest need for energy, yet you have the lowest energy reserves.
- 2) Breakfast energizes the body. It provides your body the extra push it needs to give you better productivity in the late morning. It also decreases the level of fatigue you would feel without eating breakfast. You can think more clearly and more quickly which makes the case for why breakfast is especially important on school days for kids! This important meal also helps improve concentration and problem-solving abilities
- 3) Breakfast helps performance at school and work. Research shows that eating breakfast has a positive impact on school achievement. It supports the fact that children are more alert and participate better in school activities. Generally speaking, children who eat breakfast have fewer behavior challenges than those who do not.
- 4) Breakfast is part of achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Eating a healthy breakfast after you have awoken from a long fast helps boost your metabolism. Making healthy breakfast choices helps you start your daily eating pattern in the right direction. A regular eating pattern means you are likely eating every three to four hours throughout the day and reduces unhealthy snacking habits. Breakfast eaters typically eat fewer snacks and consume less fat each day.
- 5) Breakfast is important in getting adequate nutrition. Even though we are stretched many different directions and cut corners to save time, don’t cut out breakfast! People who skip breakfast are often cutting out important nutrients from their diet. Planned breakfast choices have more vitamins and minerals than the snack foods that often replace them.
- 6) Breakfast can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Since breakfast eaters tend to eat less fat during the day, they are limiting their intake of cholesterol. People

who skip breakfast tend to have higher blood cholesterol levels, which puts them at a higher risk for heart disease.

- 7) Breakfast helps increase fiber in the average diet. Many Americans choose ready-to-eat cereals for their breakfast. Look for a cereal with at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. Add some low-fat milk to your cereal and top it with fresh sliced fruit. Now you have a high fiber, low-fat, power-packed nutritious meal! To add flavor and nutrition to cooked cereals, try blending in some fruit (craisins, dates, etc.) or use fruit juice as the cooking liquid.

Now that you know *why* it is important to eat breakfast, it's time to start planning for a daily healthy breakfast. When purchasing "breakfast-type" foods, here are some things to consider:

- ✓ Look for goods with lots of fiber (5+ g/serving) and only a few ingredients.
- ✓ Avoid cold cereals that have sugar listed in the top three ingredients. You can add a little sugar at the table so that you can control the amount.
- ✓ Choose a cereal that has a moderate level of protein (5-10 g/serving) and is low in fat (≤ 5 g/serving.) Protein-rich foods will help you avoid becoming hungry before your next meal.
- ✓ You can't rely on your ready-to-eat cereal to provide you with 100% of your Daily values. It is important to round out your breakfast with fruits and whole grains to help. Your lunch and supper will need to have vegetables and fruits, as well!

Keep breakfast simple yet healthy. Breakfast doesn't have to be time-consuming or costly, but it does need to be healthy. Take a minute or two before you go to bed to get ready for your morning meal. Set the table with the tableware you will need, mix up the pancake batter, make a breakfast casserole that you can reheat, or hard cook some eggs and shell them the night before.

One of my favorite quick breakfasts is a Two Minute miracle: Spray a small Pyrex dish with cooking spray. Add 1/3 cup of liquid egg substitute. Microwave on high for 1 – 2 minutes, or until fluffy. Sprinkle with shredded cheese. Add a slice of whole-wheat toast and low-fat milk to the meal, and you have a great start to your day. Sometimes I add a slice of deli-style turkey to add extra flavor and protein.

Tired of traditional breakfast foods? Try your favorite sandwich (e.g. grilled cheese on wheat bread), low-fat yogurt with fruit mixed in, or a breakfast burrito for a change.

Planning ahead will make your breakfast time less stressful and more nutritious. If you need more ideas for healthy breakfast foods, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!