

Five big reasons to bother with breakfast

1. Break the fast.

In the morning, children's bodies need to refuel for the day ahead after going without food for 8 to 12 hours during sleep. The body responds to not eating for hours and hours by slowing down and burning fewer calories to conserve energy. By eating breakfast, kids wake up their metabolisms and jump start their day.

2. Breakfast can help keep kids' weight in check.

By kick-starting the metabolism, the body starts burning more calories. Also, people who don't eat breakfast often consume more calories throughout the day and are more likely to be overweight than those who skip lunch. That's because someone who skips breakfast is likely to get famished before lunchtime and snack on high-calorie foods or overeat at lunch. Kids who eat breakfast tend to eat healthier overall and are more likely to participate in physical activities—two great ways to help

maintain a healthy weight.

3. Breakfast boosts brain power.

Choosing breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, fiber and protein while low in added sugar may boost kids' attention span, concentration, and memory—which they need to focus in school. Studies show that people who eat breakfast are more alert and do better on tests than people who skip breakfast. Kids who skip breakfast are absent from school more often and make more trips to the school nurse's office.

4. Breakfast is a great time to give kids healthy foods that they'll actually like.

You can't go wrong with whole-grain cereal and berries with nonfat milk. Research also has shown that kids who eat breakfast get fiber, calcium and other important nutrients. They also tend to have lower blood cholesterol levels.

Healthy breakfast options:

- Fruit, yogurt and granola parfait (in a tall glass, start with a layer of granola cereal, top with a layer of plain, low-fat yogurt and finish with a layer of berries or chopped banana; repeat)
- Fruit and yogurt smoothie (skim milk, fruit and yogurt, blended)
- Whole-grain cereal in skim milk, topped with fruit
- Whole-grain waffles topped with peanut butter, fruit, or ricotta cheese
- Oatmeal with cinnamon
- Peanut butter on a bagel with fresh fruit (banana or apple wedges) and low-fat milk
- Vegetable omelet with a bran muffin and orange juice
- Bran muffin and yogurt with berries
- Cream cheese and fresh fruit on whole wheat toast or a bagel



5. Breakfast makes kids happy.

Kids who eat breakfast feel better and happier. Skipping breakfast can make kids feel tired, restless and irritable. Their mood and energy can drop by midmorning if they don't eat at least a small morning meal.

Building breakfast into the routine

It can be difficult to find the time to sit down to a healthy breakfast, so try these tips to help make morning meals a little less stressful:

- Stock up on quick and healthy breakfast options.
- Involve kids in the breakfast plans

and allow them to choose among healthy breakfast options the night before.

- Get prepared the night before by setting the table, getting the cereal out, washing and chopping fruit, etc.

- Wake up 10 minutes earlier to enjoy the meal.

- Keep grab-and-go alternatives on standby for busy mornings, such as fresh fruit, individual boxes of cereal and yogurt.

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.