

Kids' Breakfast Makes the Grade

Breakfast – the most important meal of the day – is vital for children and adolescents. According to the American Dietetic Association, children who start their days with a healthy breakfast are more likely to:

- Concentrate better
- Have better problem-solving skills
- Be more alert
- Miss fewer days of school
- Be more physically active

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 17 percent of youth ages two to 19 are overweight, but eating breakfast can improve these numbers. Breakfast eating children are more likely to have better overall diet quality and meet recommended daily nutrient requirements than children who do not eat breakfast, a report in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association showed.

In Michigan, more than 236,000 students in 2,800 schools start their days with 25 percent of the daily nutrients they need with meals that are tailored to school-aged children through the School Breakfast Program

Michigan kids who don't have time for breakfast at home or to go through the cafeteria line won't miss out on breakfast benefits. As a part of the Expanding Breakfast Program, Michigan schools are offering Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab-and-Go Breakfasts and Breakfast After First Period, which ensures as many students as possible start their days off right.

Nine to 18 year old girls who frequently eat breakfast have higher levels of consumption of fiber and calcium, two of the USDA's "nutrients of concern" for children – key nutrients many American children are lacking in their diets – according to a study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

Seven in 10 boys and nine in 10 girls aren't getting the recommended three servings of dairy a day, but eating breakfast can help children meet that recommendation. Milk is one of the most commonly consumed foods at breakfast, and breakfast eaters who choose cereal are more likely to get the recommended three servings each day. (Source: Journal of the American Dietetic Association, 2006)

Nearly 20 percent of adults don't eat breakfast, but it's up to parents to establish good breakfast habits at home. Several studies found that when parents eat breakfast themselves and schedule daily family breakfast time, their children are more likely to eat breakfast than children whose parents do not model good behaviors. (Source: Appetite, Feb. 2009)

Don't think school breakfast is healthy? According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), school breakfasts must meet the requirements from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including:

- At least four servings of food, including milk, a fruit or vegetable, and two servings of bread or protein.
- No more than 30 percent of calories from fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat over the course of one week.
- At least 25 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein, calcium, iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin C and calories.