



# Fact Sheet

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## Breakfast—Don't Leave Home Without It!

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We have often heard it said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, yet 35–40 percent of all Americans skip breakfast. Many parents allow their children to leave for school without breakfast. As many as 48 percent of girls and 32 percent of boys do not eat breakfast every day. The first meal of the day is called breakfast because it breaks the fast that has lasted ten to twelve hours, since the last meal eaten the day before, usually dinner.

### Why is Breakfast so Important?

The body uses glucose or blood sugar for energy. Excess glucose is stored by the liver as glycogen which can be released as it is needed. By mid-morning, glycogen stores are virtually depleted, if one skips breakfast. As a result, the body has very little quick energy available. Children who skip breakfast will lack adequate glycogen stores, may be hungry, and lack the ability to concentrate in school. They may be tired, lethargic, and lack fuel for learning.

Children who do not eat breakfast often do not make up the missed nutrients in meals eaten later in the day. Research studies show that the overall nutrient intake of those who eat breakfast is more adequate than that of breakfast skippers. Studies also show that students who do not eat breakfast have higher absenteeism rates, trouble with concentration, and more behavior problems.

### Social and Economic Changes and Nutrition

Children in poverty are more likely to suffer malnutrition or undernutrition but it is not just a problem of

poverty. Social and economic changes of society have influenced family lifestyles at all levels. Some examples of social changes include increased fragmentation of the family, more single-parent families, and more dual-income families. Economic changes include unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and inadequate child care. These have increased the vulnerability of children to health and nutrition problems.

As a result of these social and economic changes, more children are fending for themselves for meals. More meals are consumed outside of the home. This is convenient, but meals away from home cost more than meals prepared at home and tend to be high in fat and sodium. More people are leaving home in the morning without breakfast.

Lack of breakfast or an inadequate breakfast may result in a nutritionally inadequate diet, influencing learning in a number of ways:

- The hunger resulting from skipping breakfast may cause children to exhibit nervousness, irritability, disinterest in learning, listlessness, and lack of concentration. Students may be fatigued, bored, apathetic.
- Children who eat breakfast earn higher scores on standardized tests, are more focused, and have lower absentee and tardiness rates.
- One-third of children who do not eat breakfast do not meet their daily protein requirement; 75 percent of children who do not eat breakfast fail to meet their recommended daily allowance for calcium.
- It is linked with learning disabilities, behavior problems, attention deficit disorder, poorer language de-

velopment, slower thinking and memory retrieval, and lower IQs.

- The learning related effects of poor nutrition set in before the visible growth related consequences appear.
- Calorie deprived children lack fuel to power the brain. They may not explore, play, or interact socially—all of which affect learning.
- A poorly nourished body cannot resist disease and infection. More illness results in more missed school and less learning.
- Poor nutrition can lead to obesity, which increased by 43 percent for children age 3 to 17 between 1984 and 1991. Obese children can lack self-esteem, earn lower achievement test scores, and a lower than expected number of them enter college.

### Why Do People Skip Breakfast?

Lack of time is the most common reason given for skipping breakfast. There are many fast and easy foods that can be prepared and eaten for breakfast. It could be the most important five minutes of the day!

### Resources

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