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# Rise, Shine, and Dine

*Serve up the benefits of breakfast — every day.*

Are you, or your kids, in too much of a [morning rush](#) to wait for the toast to pop or to gulp down a bowl of flakes? If so, you're not alone: Nearly half of all American families skip breakfast on a regular basis. But some recent research may persuade you to consider chowing down first thing in the morning more often. It shows that kids who are breakfast-eaters may have a distinct advantage over breakfast-skippers, in the following ways:

- better brain power, particularly when it comes to memory
- better test scores, school attendance, and mood
- longer attention spans in school
- better overall nutrition
- healthier body weights, even for breakfast-eaters who end up eating more overall calories than those who routinely skip the first meal of the day

## It's About Time

While there is more than enough research to support this noble cause at school, we must not forget that what we teach our children at home might just have a bigger impact on their future eating habits. But still, buying into the idea of getting your child to eat a healthy breakfast is one thing. Finding the time and the wherewithal to get your child to eat according to your plan is altogether another. These tips can help your child get breakfast in record time:

- **Rely on routine.** Studies show that if parents simply expect children to eat breakfast as a rule rather than an exception, it's more likely to become a habit for years to come.
- **Early to bed, early to rise.** If your child is always in a rush in the morning, try getting him up a bit earlier (and getting him to bed a bit earlier). That can take the edge off.
- **Spell it out.** Skipping breakfast can mean going as many as 16 or more hours without refueling. For children who are old enough to understand reason, teach them that setting out without breakfast is like driving a car on an empty tank — not a wise idea.
- **Plan ahead.** Remember to stock up, set out, and/or pack

breakfast ahead of time. Make breakfast a [self-serve meal](#) for older kids — they are more likely to eat, and it builds independence. (Research shows that kids who help plan and prepare meals tend to eat those meals.) Involve your child in the selection, shopping, preparation, and, as they get older, planning of the breakfast menus for the week.

- **Take it on the road.** Choose a variety of nutritious foods that children can easily grab in a hurry: hard-boiled eggs, sliced apples in a baggie, a bagel with low-fat cream cheese, or a bran muffin. Preparing your own "packaged" food reduces the temptation to reach for the pre-packaged, sugary, calorie- and fat-laden alternatives.

- **Enlist school support.** If your child's school offers a healthful breakfast option, then finding time for a morning meal may be as simple as getting your child to school earlier, especially if his friends are dining in similar style.

- **Add Flair to Breakfast Fare**

Whenever possible, provide a variety of food groups at each meal.

Sometimes this means being creative in order to serve the protein, carbohydrates, and fiber needed for a healthy, growing child. Although any breakfast is better than no breakfast at all, it should ideally be a nutritious one. Remember, it's best to keep things simple yet interesting. Here are some tried and true favorites to get you started:

- **Easy breakfast burritos:** Roll up scrambled eggs and some shredded cheese in a warm tortilla. Take it to go or serve alongside sliced berries.
- **Sausage sandwiches:** Place a low-fat sausage patty in between two small pancakes. Serve with string cheese or a cup of skim milk.
- **Yummy yogurt:** Mix 1 cup of low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt, 1/4 cup blueberries, and 1/4 cup cereal, such as Cheerios, for crunch (and fiber). Put in a cup and bring a spoon for eating on the road.
- **Frozen foods:** If your child is partial to frozen concoctions, you may hit the jackpot by simply making orange juice Popsicles or any of a variety of fruit slushies, smoothies, or milkshakes. Another option: freeze a few of the yogurts conveniently packaged in a squeeze tube for an any-time-of-the-day treat.

- **Cereal sense:** The trick to a healthy cereal diet is to become more discriminating about which cereals you select. So, focus on five. Read the label and aim for no more than 5 grams of sugar and at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.

- **Dinner for breakfast:** Remember, there's nothing that says that only traditional breakfast foods can be served at breakfast. Here's where your options become endless: pizza, baked potatoes, or spaghetti. When it comes right down to it, all is fair when it comes to winning the breakfast war!