The Benefits of Breakfast

The familiar saying ‘breakfast is the most important meal of the day’ is overwhelmingly supported by research findings. However, despite knowledge of its benefits, skipping breakfast remains common practice with one in seven school aged children\textsuperscript{1} and one third of adults regularly missing this essential meal.

Breakfast – A Social Meal

In our busy lives, breakfast may be the only chance for some families to eat together. Family mealtimes are known to have a significant impact on family communication and functioning, the development of healthy eating patterns in children, and improved literacy and school performance\textsuperscript{1}. One recent report suggests that one quarter of pre-school children do not share in daily mealtime conversations with their family, and as a result are missing out on a key opportunity to develop their confidence and communications skills for the future\textsuperscript{4}. Spending a few minutes every morning sharing breakfast as a family, or in a breakfast club\textsuperscript{5}, could reap benefits well beyond simply fuelling the family for the day ahead.

Fascinating Breakfast Facts

- The term ‘breakfast’ has been traced back to the mid-15th century. Breakfast literally means ‘breaking the fast’ – for many people it is around 8-14 hours since they last ate.
- Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals were created by Dr John Harvey Kellogg, who produced the first humble corn flake back in 1895.
- Around 90% of the UK population eat breakfast cereal – firmly establishing them as the preferred breakfast choice\textsuperscript{2}.

Breakfast – Feeding Body and Mind

Breakfast boosts mental and physical performance in both adults and children. Teachers commonly observe that hungry children cannot learn effectively and research upholds this observation\textsuperscript{1}. For example, compared to breakfast skippers, those who have eaten breakfast are able to: more efficiently select critical information during problem-solving tasks\textsuperscript{6}; perform better in both mathematical and creative tasks\textsuperscript{7}; and demonstrate improved accuracy on a range of cognitive function tests\textsuperscript{8}. Adults also benefit mentally from eating breakfast. In a series of memory and recall tests, those who had eaten breakfast performed significantly better at information retention tasks compared to those who had not eaten a breakfast meal. Recollection speed also improved\textsuperscript{9,10}. Recommending a healthy breakfast every day of the week should be a key part in all dietary advice.

The case for eating breakfast is clear: it provides vital nutrition; it makes us more alert; helps keep us trim and healthy; and improves children’s work and behaviour at school. Missing breakfast regularly has a negative impact on both physical and mental wellbeing.
Breakfast Cereal Eaters are Healthier

Extensive research across the globe confirms that regular breakfast cereal eaters (both adults and children) are healthier than their breakfast skipping counterparts[11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18].

BREAKFAST CEREAL EATERS TEND TO HAVE:

- Higher intakes of carbohydrates and lower intakes of fat
- Higher intakes of vitamins and minerals
- Lower body mass index & lower risk of obesity
- Lower blood cholesterol levels
- Higher fibre intakes

Recent studies suggest that regular breakfast eaters are less likely to develop heart disease and diabetes. Men who usually skip breakfast have been found to be 27% more likely to develop coronary heart disease, 15% more likely to experience substantial weight gain and 21% more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes compared to men who regularly eat breakfast[19].

This may be due to altered metabolic effects such as increased lipids and impaired insulin sensitivity. Similar results have also been reported for women[20] and young adults[21].

Table 1 shows that breakfast cereals with milk are able to help keep fat, salt, and sugar intakes low, while providing significant amounts of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

**Kellogg’s breakfast cereals are fortified with a range of B-group vitamins and iron. All our children’s cereals are now fortified with vitamin D which is found to be commonly deficient in the UK diet.**

Nutritional Contribution of Breakfast Cereals

Fortified breakfast cereals make a valuable contribution to UK dietary intakes, particularly for those in economically challenged households[22]. For example, in the UK breakfast cereals provide around 20% of a child’s average intake of folic acid, iron and vitamin D, whilst contributing just 2% of average fat intake, 7% sugar and 4% of average salt intakes. Whilst we shouldn’t quite ‘Breakfast like a King’, the Department of Health (DH) recommends that breakfast provides one fifth (20%) of daily requirements for energy, protein, fibre, fat, sugar, salt, vitamins and minerals[23].

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![Table 1: Contribution of Breakfast to Recommended Intakes](image-url)

**References**