



Breakfast – the most important meal of the day

Breakfast is your child's first meal after approximately 8 hours sleep. While your child hasn't been burning up much physical energy, the body has gone through a significant amount of regeneration and growth during the sleeping hours. For this reason plus also the fact that a child's metabolic rate is at a peak in the morning, it is vital that every child (and adult) has breakfast.

When your child first wakes up their blood sugar levels are low and they will require replenishing with something healthy. Breakfast is the meal that will kick-start the brain and body, providing it with the fuel it needs. Skipping breakfast can lead to an energy slump mid-morning. If there isn't enough fuel to supply the brain, it is easy to see why mental and physical tasks can be difficult; this is more pronounced in children. Many studies have shown the influence of a good breakfast on a child's behaviour and overall eating habits. Children who skip breakfast tend to have more body fat and may have difficulty learning.

Obviously cereal is a quick and easy breakfast, but how do you know are the healthiest options. A recent Choice review of breakfast cereals showed *“kids get a raw deal with breakfast cereals. Most kid's cereals are so highly processed they no longer resemble the grain they started out as. The majority are fibre-flimsy, and are either too salty or too sugary. Out of all the breakfast cereals we looked at, the most sugary ones are all aimed at kids, with the equivalent of 2-3 teaspoons (10-15gm) of sugar in a 30g serve (approx ¼ cup).”*

So what do you need to know about cereal labels?

1. How much sugar? Is sugar one of the first few ingredients listed? How many different types of sugar are listed? Remember any ingredient with '-ose' at the end is sugar.
2. How high is the Total Carbohydrate? The total carbohydrate includes all sugars which are both natural and added to the cereal. If the cereal is high in total carbohydrate but lower in sugars, then it might be a healthier option
3. Is the cereal a wholegrain one? Whole grains are generally less processed and contain more of the natural constituents found in the grain including vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Be aware of cereals which have had the vitamins and minerals added back after processing, these often cannot be used by the body and are just excreted.
4. Is the cereal low in sodium? A cereal with less than 100mg of sodium in 100gm of food is okay.

5. Is the cereal low in saturated and trans fats? Most cereals are generally low in fat, but make sure you check the label especially for harmful trans fats.

Cereals to consider:

- Rolled oats or quinoa flakes
- Good quality muesli full of nuts and seeds (unless there is an allergy issue)
- Kapai Puku Seeds of Life makes a great cereal mixed with natural yoghurt
- Bircher muesli
- Norganics makes a great range of cereals

Other options for breakfast include:

- 1 slice of wholegrain bread (consider using breads made from spelt, kamut, quinoa as an option to wheat), 1 egg, small amount of butter and a shaped cookie cutter. Press the cookie cutter into the bread, lift out the centre of the shape carefully. Butter both sides of the bread and the cut-out. Place both the bread and the cut-out in a hot frypan and break an egg into the hole in the bread. Fry until egg cooks, turn both bread and shape until both cooked. Place on a plate and serve.
- Fruit and yoghurt
- Wholegrain/Spelt or other bread alternative, toasted and served with baked beans (low salt)
- Toast with nut spread e.g. almond, hazelnut, brazil nut, cashew nut

Always serve some protein with breakfast; this will help to regulate blood sugar levels and to assist with your child's concentration.

Healthy Lunchbox Ideas

Lunch should include protein and carbohydrate(s) e.g. tuna on a wholegrain roll and vegetable sticks. You can add some fruit and always include water rather than juice. Remember that your child is likely to want to play rather than eat so make lunch easy to eat while still being nutritious. Examples of a healthy lunchbox include:

- Wholegrain (using some wheat alternatives sometimes) sandwich, yoghurt, grapes
- Cream cheese, chicken and avocado Lebanese bread rolled up
- Bagel with avocado, sliced chicken and grated cucumber
- Pumpnickel bread with cheese, hummus and red capsicum
- Pocket bread with grated cheese, tomato, cucumber and yoghurt dip and canned tuna
- Roast beef salad with tomato, lettuce and avocado
- Tuna or salmon patties with a minty yoghurt dip
- Fruit and tub of natural yoghurt
- Various cheeses, avocado, fruit and crackers
- Cheese, avocado and various meats as finger foods

- Toasted cheese fingers and fruit
- Cottage cheese, avocado and crackers
- Cream cheese on toast or bagel
- Cold sausages and grated/sliced vegetables
- Crackers with cream cheese and dip
- Chicken/turkey and dips wrapped in flat bread
- Small tubs of dips (hummus, yoghurt) with toasted bread fingers, yoghurt and strawberries
- Small pack of grated cheese
- Cherry and grape tomatoes
- Mini yoghurts
- Chicken drumsticks
- Bite size raw vegies with some dipping sauce or hummus
- Sushi rolls (particularly good with brown rice)
- Muffin sized frittatas
- Savoury muffins
- Homemade sausage rolls
- Puff pastry rolls filled with cheese and vegetables e.g asparagus, capsicum, tomatoes
- Use goats cheese, avocado or any vege dip as an alternative to butter/margarine

Afternoon Snack Ideas

Pre-schoolers and primary school children need to eat every 4 to 6 hours to keep their energy levels up. Three main meals and a morning and afternoon snack will meet this requirement so long as the food provided is nutritious and full of healthy energy. To ensure that snacks are nutritious avoid overly fatty foods and sweetened foods and drinks. If you are going to give milk then provide it after the snack or meal to avoid filling your child up on the milk.

To encourage healthy snacks have them readily available in your kitchen cupboard or refrigerator. Also try to rotate the snacks which you provide to your child, this helps to broaden their tastes as well as ensuring they are getting a range of nutrients from their food.

Below are some snack ideas for you to try, aim for as much variety as possible. Try to combine a protein food with a carbohydrate food to help to maintain stable blood sugar levels e.g. fruit and yoghurt, fruit and crackers, fruit and cheese, other ideas include:

- Fruit Sticks (choose 100% fruit from the health food section of the supermarket)
- Cheese Sticks or Babybel cheese rounds
- Fruit, especially all berries
- Crackers – organic brown rice, sesame, water crackers (all low in sugar and salt)

- Frozen fruit – grapes are especially delicious, other fruits include melon, orange, banana
- Frozen yoghurt
- Peel an orange so it is like a snake, rewrap the orange to be eaten fresh later
- Cream cheese on crackers
- Falafels and vegie sausages
- Wholemeal crumpets, bagels and muffins
- Naturally sun-dried sultanas, dates or figs - without sulphur (Numbers 220-228 on label)
- Healthy muffins made with organic ingredients, wholemeal flour (spelt flour is a good option to wheat) and with reduced sugar
- Smoothie with mixed berries, you can freeze these into ice-blocks
- Frozen bananas with a passionfruit yoghurt dip
- Homemade ice-blocks with a mix of natural yoghurt blended with fruit pulp
- Mini pizzas, using mini pocket breads, with avocado, ham, tomato, pineapple etc
- Carrot and celery sticks with hummus dip

Great recipe books which are full of delicious recipes that are high in vegetables (and the kids love them) are Vegie Smugglers Book 1 and 2 by Wendy Blume.

All information provided is for general information purposes only and does not take into account individual medical conditions (allergies, sensitivities etc).

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