

## Breakfast Brain Power

It's important for kids to have breakfast every day, but *what* they eat in the morning is crucial too. Choosing breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, [fiber](#), and protein while low in added sugar may boost kids' attention span, concentration, and memory — which they need to learn in school. Kids who eat breakfast are more likely to get fiber, calcium, and other important nutrients. They also tend to keep their weight under control, have lower blood cholesterol levels and fewer absences from school, and make fewer trips to the school nurse with stomach complaints related to hunger. Breakfast kick-starts the body's metabolism, the process by which the body converts the fuel in food to energy. And when the metabolism gets moving, the body starts burning calories.

## Making Breakfast Happen

It would be great to serve whole-grain waffles, fresh fruit, and low-fat milk each morning. But it can be difficult to make a healthy breakfast happen when you're rushing to get yourself and the kids ready in the morning and juggling the general household chaos.

So try these practical suggestions to ensure that — even in a rush — your kids get a good breakfast before they're out the door:

- stock your kitchen with healthy breakfast options
- prepare as much as you can the night before (gets dishes and utensils ready, cut up fruit, etc.)
- get everyone up 10 minutes earlier
- let kids help plan and prepare breakfast
- have grab-and-go alternatives (fresh fruit; individual boxes or baggies of whole-grain, low-sugar cereal; yogurt or smoothies; trail mix) on days when there is little or no time to eat

What **not** to serve for breakfast is important too. Sure, toaster pastries and some breakfast bars are portable, easy, and appealing to kids. But many have no more nutritional value than a candy bar and are high in sugar and calories. Read the [nutrition labels](#) carefully before you toss these breakfast bars and pastries into your shopping cart.

Try to serve a balanced breakfast that includes some [carbohydrates](#), protein, and fiber. Carbs are a good source of immediate energy for the body. Energy from protein tends to kick in after the carbs are used up. Fiber helps provide a feeling of fullness and, therefore, discourages overeating. And when combined with [healthy drinks](#), fiber helps move food through the digestive system, preventing constipation and lowering cholesterol.

Good sources include:

- **carbohydrates:** whole-grain cereals, brown rice, whole-grain breads and muffins, fruits, vegetables
- **protein:** low-fat or nonfat dairy products, lean meats, eggs, nuts (including nut butters), seeds, and cooked dried beans
- **fiber:** whole-grain breads, waffles, and cereals; brown rice, bran, and other grains; fruits, vegetables, beans, and nuts

Here are some ideas for healthy breakfasts to try:

- whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk topped with fruit
- whole-grain waffles topped with peanut butter or ricotta cheese and fruit
- whole-wheat pita stuffed with sliced hard-cooked eggs
- hot cereal topped with nuts or fruit sprinkled with cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, or cloves

- half a whole-grain bagel topped with peanut butter and fresh fruit (banana or apple wedges) and low-fat milk
- breakfast smoothie (low-fat milk or yogurt, fruit, and teaspoon of bran, whirled in a blender)
- vegetable omelet with whole-wheat toast
- bran muffin and berries
- sliced cucumbers and hummus in a whole-wheat pita
- lean turkey and tomato on a toasted English muffin
- heated leftover rice with chopped apples, nuts, and cinnamon
- low-fat cream cheese and fresh fruit, such as sliced strawberries, on whole-grain bread or half a whole-grain bagel
- shredded cheese on a whole-wheat tortilla, folded in half and microwaved for 20 seconds and topped with salsa

And don't forget how important your good example is. Let your kids see you making time to enjoy breakfast every day. Even if you just wash down some whole-wheat toast and a banana with a glass of juice or milk, you're showing how important it is to face the day only after refueling your brain and body with a healthy morning meal.

-Adapted from [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org)