

Build a Better Breakfast

We all know the drill: kids wake up late and barely have time to get dressed and gather their backpacks before it's time to leave for school. Many times children grab a breakfast bar and juice box, or skip eating all together. While it may seem like no big deal (they'll have lunch in a few hours after all), studies show that eating a healthful, well-balanced breakfast can go a long way to helping kids do better in school, and increase performance, attendance, and concentration.

So what's a busy parent to do? Start by getting the kids up 15 minutes earlier. Set out clothes and prepare backpacks the night before to gain more precious minutes in the morning. Then use that time to prepare a healthful breakfast. Here are some quick breakfast tips:

- Hard boil a dozen eggs. Peel and keep them in a covered plastic container in the fridge. This makes it easy to grab a quick bite of protein before school.
- Try yogurt with cereal instead of milk. Topping plain or vanilla yogurt with high fiber cereals, nuts, or dried fruit provides protein and a long-term energy source for your child. Try to stay away from yogurts with a lot of sugar and/or food colorings. If your child is looking for a sweeter taste, drizzle the yogurt with a bit of honey.
- Buy whole wheat/high fiber products. Replace the white bread toast and frozen waffles with whole wheat versions. When topped with peanut butter they provide a long lasting protein punch, and most times children won't know the difference.
- Pre-wash and slice fruit the night before. This makes it easy to grab some berries or melon without the prep time.
- Think outside the box. Why not make a ham and cheese sandwich? Eat a slice of cold veggie pizza? Leftovers from dinner often contain the protein and veggies your body needs, and they are already prepared! There's no rule saying you have to eat bacon and eggs.

Something to remember when creating a nutritious breakfast is to stay away from high carbohydrate foods that are low in whole grains. Pancakes with syrup, or French toast made with white bread may be your family's favorite breakfast, but don't provide enough nutrients to jump start your child's brain in the morning. Similarly, try to avoid sugary drink boxes or juices made mostly of high fructose corn syrup. Offer fresh orange juice, milk, or water instead.

Finally, spend those extra minutes in the morning sitting down with your children and eating a nutritious breakfast together. When you eat with your children, you send the message that starting your day with a healthful meal is a priority. It may take a few days to get into the habit of waking up earlier, but those 15 minutes will go a long way to helping your child succeed in school.