

# Breakfast

## Key to Academic Excellence

**All children need breakfast every day**  
**Bottom Line: It takes more than books for a child to learn**

Every student needs to eat breakfast because a hungry child cannot learn. Yet many children come to school without eating breakfast. Children may not eat breakfast because they do not have time or are not hungry when they wake up. With busy family schedules, many children are left to prepare breakfast on their own. Those who do eat may choose low-nutrient foods that do not sustain energy levels throughout the morning. Many core subjects are taught in the morning, so make sure breakfast fuels your child with the energy needed to perform better in school.

*“Numerous studies, reviews and position papers ... have found that increased participation in School Breakfast Programs is associated with better academic test scores, daily attendance and class participation, and it also has been linked to reductions in absences and tardiness.”*

— David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., 16th United States Surgeon General, Director, Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine, Testimony on Child Nutrition Reauthorization to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, May 16, 2009

### Benefits of Eating Breakfast

**Children** benefit because they:

- have higher test scores, work faster, make fewer errors and are more creative
- are less likely to be sent to the principal or visit the school nurse
- are better able to concentrate on learning
- are more cooperative and get along better with classmates
- are healthier and have improved attendance

**Parents** benefit because:

- mornings are easier
- children start the day ready to learn
- concerns about skipping breakfast are relieved

**Teachers** benefit because:

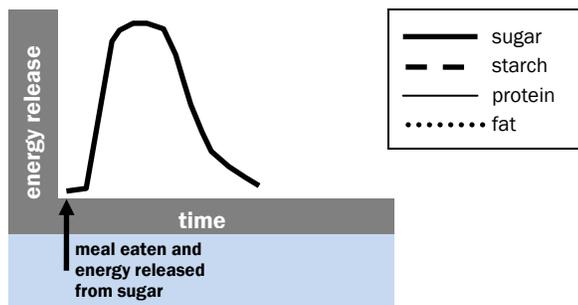
- behavior improves
- academic success improves
- attention increases

### Wise Food Choices Enhance Learning

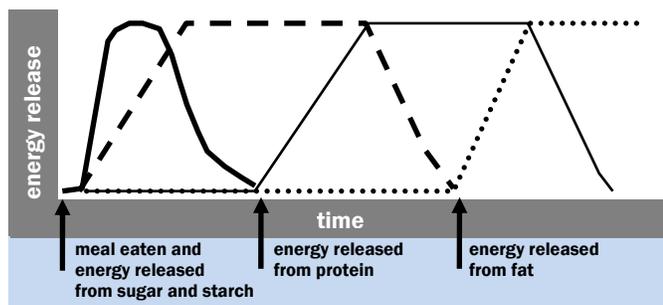
In many classrooms, demanding school subjects like math and science are taught in the morning. When children eat breakfast at school, they start the day fueled to learn so they can do their best on their hardest work. A good breakfast also helps sustain students' energy throughout the morning.

#### Comparison of Energy Available for Learning from Two Different Breakfasts

**Breakfast 1: Sweetened Fruit Drink or Soda, Fruit-Filled Toaster Pastry**



**Breakfast 2: Orange Juice, Toast or Cereal, Nonfat or 1% Milk**



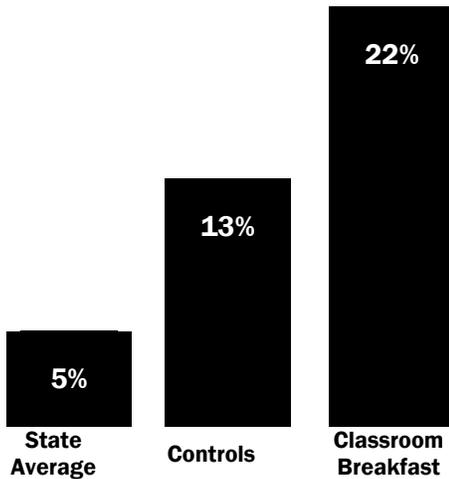
Sugary foods, such as fruit, fruit juice or fruit drinks, candy or soda, eaten in place of a meal cause a quick rise in blood sugar and energy in children. About an hour later, blood sugar and energy decline rapidly, bringing on hunger symptoms.

## School Breakfast Programs Boost Brain Power

### Two case studies in action:

- School breakfast participation is directly correlated with higher standardized test scores among elementary school students. The Center for Social Policy at the University of Massachusetts in Boston conducted a study that found a participation rate of 80 to 100 percent in the School Breakfast Program resulted in higher English and math test scores than participation at lower levels. The results confirm previous research showing that school breakfast participation can lead to better grades.
- Maryland's Meals for Achievement breakfast pilot program offers classroom breakfast to all students. The program found tardiness declined by 8 percent, suspensions decreased by 1.6 days per month, standardized test scores increased 17 percent over the state average and behavior improved.

### Percentage Improvement in MSPAP\* "Satisfactory" Rating



\* Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, 2001



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## How Simple Can It Be?

Breakfast can be quick, easy and healthy. Here are 10 quick, nutritious breakfasts that take less than three minutes to fix. The key indicates which three food groups are included in each breakfast.

Toasted English muffin, peanut butter,  
glass of milk



Cold cereal, banana and milk



Heated leftover cheese pizza



Crackers and cheese, orange wedges



Yogurt, apple and wheat toast



Ham and cheese sandwich with glass of milk



Heated leftover macaroni and cheese, apple



Instant oatmeal, canned peaches, milk



Baby carrots, mozzarella cheese stick, bagel



Tomato soup made with milk, crackers



**Key:** = Milk Group = Protein Group = Vegetable Group  
 = Fruit Group = Grain Group

### How to Make Sure Your Child Eats Breakfast

- Keep breakfast foods on hand.
- Keep breakfast foods highly visible and in convenient spots for children to grab.
- Be a role model for your child. Eat breakfast.
- Encourage your child to eat at school if they do not get a chance to eat at home.



### References

- *Breakfast Key to Excellence*, Western Dairy Association, 2009.
- *Maryland Meals for Achievement Classroom Breakfast Pilot Program*, Maryland State Department of Education, 2001.
- *School Breakfast Pre-Study*, Center for Social Policy, UMass Boston, Report to Project Bread, 2005. [http://www.projectbread.org/site/PageServer?pagename=end\\_mcas](http://www.projectbread.org/site/PageServer?pagename=end_mcas)
- *Teachers' Perceptions of the School Breakfast Program*, End Hunger CT!, 2003. <http://www.endhungerct.org/Teachers%20Perceptions%20Survey%20Report.pdf>

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