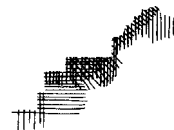




## News Release

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# Breakfast—Don't Leave Home Without It!

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It's often said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, yet 35 to 40 percent of all Americans skip breakfast. Many parents allow their children to leave for school without breakfast. As many as 48 percent of girls and 32 percent of boys do not eat breakfast every day.

The first meal of the day is called breakfast because it breaks the fast that has lasted 10 to 12 hours, since the last meal eaten the day before, usually dinner.

Why is breakfast so important? The body uses glucose or blood sugar for energy. Excess glucose is stored by the liver as glycogen, which can be released as it is needed. By mid-morning, glycogen stores are virtually depleted if breakfast is skipped. As a result, the body has very little quick energy available. Children who skip breakfast will lack adequate glycogen stores. They may be hungry and lack the ability to concentrate in school. They may be tired, lethargic, and lack fuel for learning.

Often, children who do not eat breakfast are not able to make up the missed nutrients in meals eaten later in the day. Studies show that the overall nutrient intake of those who eat breakfast is more adequate than that of breakfast-skippers. One-third of children who do not eat breakfast do not meet their daily protein requirement and 75 percent of children who do not eat breakfast fail to meet their recommended daily allowance for calcium.

Studies show that students who do not eat breakfast have higher absenteeism rates, trouble with concentration and more behavior problems. They do not score as high on standardized tests as students who eat breakfast, and they may have lower grade point averages.

Lack of breakfast or an inadequate breakfast may result in a nutritionally inadequate diet which can influence learning in a number of ways. The hunger resulting from skipping breakfast may cause children to exhibit nervousness, irritability, disinterest in learning, listlessness, and lack of concentration. Students may be fatigued, bored, or apathetic.

Poor nutrition has been linked with learning disabilities, behavior problems, attention deficit disorder, poorer language development, slower thinking and memory retrieval, and lower IQs. The learning-related effects of poor nutrition set in before the visible growth related consequences appear. Calorie deprived children lack fuel to power the brain. They might not explore, play, or socially interact—all affecting learning.

A poorly nourished body cannot resist disease and infection. More illness results in more missed school and less learning. Children who skip breakfast are tardy or absent from school more often than those who eat breakfast regularly.

Poor nutrition can lead to obesity, which increased by 43 percent for children age 3 to 17 between 1984 and 1991. Obese children can lack self-esteem or earn lower achievement test scores. A lower-than-expected number of them enter college.

Social and economic changes have influenced nutrition. Children in poverty are more likely to suffer malnutrition or undernutrition, but it is not just a problem of poverty. Social and economic changes in society have influenced family lifestyles at all levels. Some examples of social changes include increased fragmentation of the family, more single-parent families, and more dual-income families. Economic changes include unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and inadequate child care. These have increased the vulnerability of children to health and nutrition problems.

As a result of these social and economic changes, more children are fending for themselves for meals. More meals are consumed outside of the home. Although quick and easy, meals away from home cost more than meals prepared at home and tend to be high in fat and sodium.

Lack of time is the most common reason given for skipping breakfast. There are many fast, easy foods that can be prepared and eaten for breakfast. It could be the most important five minutes of the day.

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**FactSheet**

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