



center for BEST
PRACTICES



SCHOOL BREAKFAST – HEALTHIER THAN YOU THINK

School breakfast provides students a healthy start to the school day! School breakfast is healthier than most people realize, and can benefit kids, classrooms and communities. Learn about the nutritional qualities of school breakfast, and how it can improve student performance and create calmer classrooms.

NUTRITION GUIDELINES

Schools participating in the National School Breakfast Program (NSBP) must adhere to [nutrition guidelines](#) supported by science and provided by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). School nutrition programs are self-supporting, meaning, they are not part of the school system's budget; and reimbursement from USDA is given to schools when guidelines are followed. The reimbursement covers the cost of food, preparation and serving of foods and beverages, and food service employee wages.

According to the USDA guidelines, school breakfast must include:

1. A full cup of fruit and/or vegetables – either fresh, frozen, dried or canned. Juice may be offered, but no more than ½ cup serving towards the full serving. The remaining serving must be either fresh, frozen, dried or canned;
2. Two servings of whole grain rich products; may be combined with protein rich foods such as eggs or yogurt;
3. Eight ounces of fat free or 1% milk.

Schools receive reimbursement for breakfasts served to all students as long as:

- Each breakfast contains the items above, AND
- Students select three items, one of which MUST be ½ of fruit/juice. For example – one serving of grain, 4 oz. yogurt and a banana would be a “reimbursable” breakfast)

HOW HEALTHY IS SCHOOL BREAKFAST?

Even though food items provided to students at school sometimes look the same as breakfast foods found in grocery stores, convenience stores or fast food restaurants, their nutritional profile is very different.

- Breakfast grains at school are whole grain rich, low in sugar and packed with vitamins and minerals.
- Juices are 100% fruit/vegetables; and fruits and vegetables are fresh or frozen. If canned fruit is served, it is packed in light syrup, water or fruit juice.
- Calorie levels have an age appropriate minimum and maximum.
- Saturated fat is less than 10% of total calories.
- Breakfast is low in sodium.

For example, General Mills' Cinnamon Toast Crunch Cereal Bar can be found in both grocery stores and schools. The cereal bar in schools is served as part of a reimbursable school breakfast, which must meet USDA nutrition guidelines; whereas, the cereal bar sold in grocery stores or at the corner market does not have to meet any nutritional requirements.



Dietary Comparison of Cinnamon Toast Crunch Cereal Bar		
Nutritional Content	School Breakfast	Store Bought
Calories	150	180
Total Fat	3g (5% of DV*)	4g (6% of DV)
Sugars	9g	14g
Calories from Fat	30	36
Sat. Fat	.5g (3% of DV)	2g (10% of DV)
Sodium	110mg (5% of DV)	150mg (6% of DV)
Total Carbs	30g (10% of DV)	33g (11% of DV)
Dietary Fiber	3g (11% of DV)	1g (4% of DV)
Protein	3g	3g

HOW ARE BREAKFAST MENUS PLANNED?

Menus are planned by nutrition professionals. Breakfast menu planning is difficult because nutrition professionals must balance creating a menu that adheres to USDA regulations while offering a variety of selections that a diverse population of students will accept. Universally, students prefer products that are sweeter and higher in sodium, which can be challenging for nutrition professionals. However, breakfast items are student-tested regularly to ensure that the menu contains items students like and will consume. If unpopular items are served, students won't select them, which means students lose out on the benefits of breakfast AND it contributes to food waste.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE ADDED BENEFITS OF BREAKFAST!

School Breakfast is much more than a way to fill an empty belly. It helps kids focus, contributes to higher attendance rates, and kids who eat school breakfast tend to be healthier overall.

- Students who eat school breakfast attend, on average, 1.5 more days of school per year¹
- Students who eat school breakfast score, on average, 17.5% higher on standardized math scores²

- Kids who eat school breakfast are more likely to consume milk and fruit as part of their breakfast³
- Children in low-income families who eat school breakfast have a better overall diet than children who miss breakfast or get breakfast somewhere else⁴
- Children who participate in the school breakfast program are less likely to be obese, overweight, and are more likely to have a lower body mass index (BMI)^{5,6,7,8}

YOUR VOICE IS IMPORTANT!

If you would like to learn more about breakfast in your school and/or share your thoughts and ideas, please contact your School Nutrition Director. Through collaboration and creativity, positive partnerships are formed. For additional resources and information on School Breakfast, visit the [Center for Best Practices](#).

References:

1. [No Kid Hungry Starts with Breakfast](#). Share Our Strength, 2015.
2. [No Kid Hungry Starts with Breakfast](#). Share Our Strength, 2015
3. School meals: types of foods offered to and consumed by children at lunch and breakfast. Condon, E. M., Crepinsek, M. K., & Fox, M. K. (2009). *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109(2 Supplement 1), S67-S78.
4. Eating breakfast greatly improves school children's diet quality. Basiotis, P. P., Lino, M., & Anand, R. S., 1999.
5. School breakfast and body mass index: a longitudinal observational study of middle school students. Wang, S., Schwartz, M. B., Shebi, F. M., Read, M., Henderson, K. E., & Ickovics, J. R. (2016). *Pediatric Obesity*, published online ahead of print.
6. Estimation of treatment effects without an exclusion restriction: with an application to the analysis of the School Breakfast Program Millimet, D. L., & Tchernis, R. (2013).. *Journal of Applied Economics*, 28, 982-1017.
7. School nutrition programs and the incidence of childhood obesity. Millimet, D. L., Tchernis, R., & Husain, M. (2010). *Journal of Human Resources*, 45(3), 640-654.
8. School breakfast program but not school lunch program participation is associated with lower body mass index. Gleason, P. M., & Dodd, A. H. (2009). *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109(2 Supplement 1), S118-S128.