



# Elementary-School Children's Breakfast Consumption Cognitions and Behaviors

C. Delaney;<sup>1</sup> M.P. Leary, PhD, RCEP;<sup>2</sup> K. Eck, MS, RD; <sup>1</sup>K.P. Shelnutt, PhD, RD;<sup>3</sup> M.D. Olfert, PhD, RD;<sup>2</sup> C. Byrd-Bredbenner, PhD, RD, FAND<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Nutritional Sciences Department, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; <sup>2</sup>Department of Human Nutrition and Food, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV;

<sup>3</sup>Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

## Abstract

**Objectives:** To describe the breakfast cognitions (i.e., importance, facilitators, barriers) and behaviors of elementary school children (6-to-11 years).

**Methods:** Children completed a survey (n=194) and participated in moderator led breakfast-themed focus group discussions (n=33). Data were content analyzed by 2 trained researchers to detect themes and trends.

**Results:** Survey results revealed that children ate breakfast  $5.75 \pm 2.24\text{SD}$  days/week. Focus group discussions indicated that kids think breakfast is the most important meal of the day and that eating breakfast daily promotes better health and prevents feeling hungry later in the day. Cereal, fruit, yogurt, pancakes, oatmeal, and eggs were identified as examples of healthy breakfast foods. Children agreed that parents feel breakfast is very important for having energy throughout the day. Kids reported that facilitators to eating breakfast were waking up hungry, not wanting to feel hungry, establishing a routine, having foods prepared by parents, and eating with siblings. Children reported that their families usually have family breakfasts on weekends, but not weekdays. Barriers to breakfast include over sleeping, competing activities (playing games, hectic schedules), and not feeling hungry in the morning. To overcome barriers, kids suggested having grab-and-go foods (banana, granola bars) readily available and using an alarm to remind them to sit down and eat breakfast. To encourage family members to eat breakfast more often, kids said that they could remind them of the importance of breakfast to health, wake up earlier, prepare breakfast ahead of time (put cereal out the night before), use ready-to-eat foods (frozen waffles), eat breakfast at school on busy mornings, and ask parents for food options that appeal to children. Most kids agreed that their parents' breakfast intake affected their own desire to eat breakfast and their breakfast food choices. Children thought that they influenced their siblings' breakfast food choices and their desire to eat in the morning.

**Conclusions:** Future nutrition education interventions should encourage parents to remind kids about the benefits of breakfast and to overcome barriers that lead to breakfast skipping, ask kids for suggestions, offer varied options, and prepare breakfast ahead of time.

## Methods

### Sample

- School-aged children (6-11 years old)
- From Florida, New Jersey, and West Virginia

### Data Collection

- Brief self-report survey (n=194)
- Focus group discussions (n=33)

### Data Analysis

- Continuous comparison to identify point of data saturation
- Content analysis to identify key themes

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What Kids Had to Say
"[Breakfast is] really important or your stomach will growl."
"Need to eat something to start your day or you will get a stomachache."
"[Breakfast is] very important because it gives you energy throughout the day."
"Sometimes I am not hungry in the morning and I like to sleep in. I wake up at the latest possible time, so I don't have time for breakfast."
"In the morning I don't like to feel tired, so I like to have energy by eating breakfast."
"Maybe make breakfast the night before so if you're running late in the morning, you can put it in a container and eat it on the way."
"[Parents should] get more cereals for breakfast and have a chart with options [for kids to choose from]."
"Set an alarm to wake up early [to have time to eat breakfast]"
"As soon as you [parent] wake up, make breakfast before they [kids] wake up and have it on the table so that it's ready when they [kids] wake up."
"I think it is important because I always hear people say 'Breakfast is the most important meal of the day'"

## Strengths & Limitations

### Strengths

- Heterogeneous sample recruited in 3 unique geographic locations (FL, NJ, WV)
- Focus group discussions led by trained moderators using scripted moderator guides

### Limitations

- Focus groups led by different researchers in each state

## Conclusions

- Children are aware of the importance of breakfast and can readily identify healthy breakfast choices.
- Children relied on their parents to have breakfast prepared ahead of time on hectic mornings.
- To overcome barriers that lead to breakfast skipping, parents should ask kids for suggestions, offer varied options, and prepare breakfast ahead of time.
- Future nutrition education interventions should encourage parents to remind their kids about the benefits of breakfast.

## Results

- Children reported eating breakfast  $5.75 \pm 2.24\text{SD}$  days/week
- Children agreed breakfast is important to
  - Prevent hunger
  - Provide energy
  - Start to the day right
- Children feel that healthy breakfast foods include cereal, fruit, yogurt, pancakes, oatmeal, and eggs
- Facilitators of eating breakfast included:
  - Waking up hungry
  - Not wanting to feel hungry later
  - Having a routine
  - Having food prepared by parents
  - Eating with siblings
- Barriers to eating breakfast included:
  - Over sleeping
  - Competing activities (playing games, hectic schedules)
  - Not feeling hungry in the morning
- Suggestions for overcoming barriers
  - Parents should remind kids about the importance of breakfast
  - Wake up earlier
  - Prepare breakfast ahead of time
  - Use ready-to-eat foods (frozen waffles)
  - Have grab-and-go options to eat on the run (dry cereal, fruit, granola bars)
  - Eat breakfast at school
  - Ask parents for food options that appeal to children

