

Breakfast Cognitions and Practices of Parents of Elementary-School Aged Children

R.L. Clark, RD¹, K. Eck MS RD², C. Delaney, BS², K.P. Shelnett, PhD, RD³, C. Byrd-Bredbenner, PhD, RD, FAND²; M.D. Olfert, DrPH, RD¹,

¹Department of Human Nutrition and Food, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV; ²Nutritional Sciences Department, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; ³Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL



Abstract

Objective: To determine parents' perceptions and behavioral practices related to their elementary-school aged children's breakfast consumption.

Methods: Focus group discussion were completed by 37 English- and Spanish-speaking parents of 6 to 11-year-old children from 3 states (NJ, WV, FL) and a larger sample completed a brief survey (n=185).

Results: Parents completing the survey ate breakfast 5.82 ± 1.56 SD days/week. Focus group participants felt breakfast was important because it ensured that kids were not going to feel hungry, helped kids have adequate energy, and supported better behavior and focus at school. Parents realized kids noticed what parents ate for breakfast and wanted to mimic these behaviors, so parents felt it was important for them to eat foods they wanted kids to eat. The biggest barrier to eating breakfast was busy schedules resulting in inadequate time. To overcome time barriers, some parents used grab-and-go foods (e.g., bagel, cereal bars), planned ahead to have breakfast options readily available, let kids choose from options, and woke up earlier. Eating breakfast at school was another way parents coped with time barriers. Although many of their children ate breakfast at school, Spanish-speaking parents felt it was better for kids to eat at home because they could monitor and control what children ate. Other breakfast barriers were kids not feeling hungry in the morning or not liking traditional breakfast foods. To cope, parents served snack foods instead of breakfast foods because they felt that eating something was better than nothing, let kids choose their food, and served non-traditional options (quesadillas, pizza). Busy schedules got in the way of family breakfast on weekdays, so parents focused on eating family breakfasts on weekends and tended to serve foods requiring more preparation time (e.g., pancakes). Since entering elementary school, parents felt they had to cater to children's requests more to avoid conflict and ensure kids ate, which made having varied breakfast options and involving children in selecting foods increasingly important.

Conclusion: Understanding parents' breakfast cognitions and behaviors helps nutrition educators develop interventions tailored to their needs, such as including strategies for improving the frequency and healthfulness of breakfast.

Methods

Sample

- Parents of children aged 6-11
- English and Spanish speaking
- From West Virginia, Florida, and New Jersey



Data Collection

- Focus Groups
 - Conducted by trained moderators
 - Conducted in English or Spanish
 - Data constantly compared to identify data saturation point
 - Researchers trained in qualitative data analysis content analyzed data
- Survey:
 - Brief self-report survey

Funding Source

United States Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Grant Number 2017-680001-26351



Results

Importance

- Helps kids have energy at school
- Promotes better behavior
- "It's important so that they can start their day right."

Parent Breakfast Cognitions

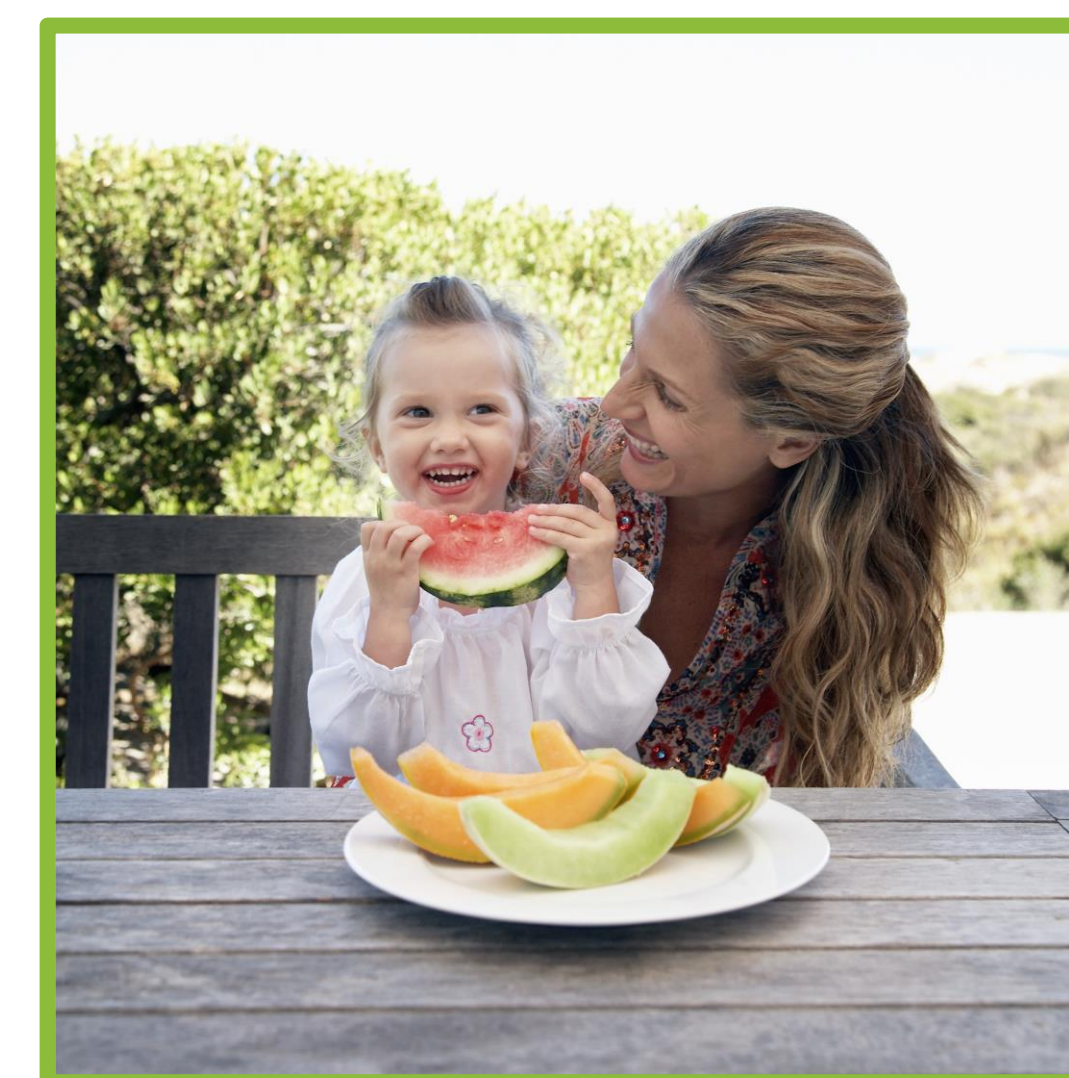
Common Breakfast Foods Eaten

- Cereal
- Eggs
- Milk
- Fruit
- School breakfast



Barriers to Breakfast

- Inadequate time
- "If we have something to do or somewhere to go, we don't have time to make breakfast."
- Kids don't like breakfast foods
- "My one kid doesn't like breakfast foods, which makes it difficult."



Facilitators for Overcoming Breakfast Barriers

- Grab-and-go foods
- "If I have to, I'll send dry cereal in a bag, or a cereal bar with them."
- Prepare ahead
- "Get everything is ready the night before. Clothes are laid out, lunches are packed, so then in the morning we just have to eat breakfast and get dressed."
- Have kids help
- Wake up earlier

Parents' Suggestions for Other Families

- Offer a "Choice Basket"- include options kids can choose to eat in the morning.
- Try alternatives-Offer kids smoothies, rice and beans, or quesadillas.
- Order groceries online to save time and be sure the house is stocked with healthy breakfast foods kids enjoy eating
- Teach kids the skills they need to prepare their own breakfasts
- For busy days or when kids don't feel hungry, send kids to school with breakfast foods (bagel, cereal bar, granola bar, instant breakfast drink).

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Percent (n=37)
Language	
English	65%
Spanish	35%
Gender	
Female	97%
Male	3%
Education	
High school degree or less	22%
Some College	22%
Bachelor's degree or higher	57%
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	48%
White	46%
Other	6%
Characteristic	Mean±SD
Parent Age	38.97±5.38
Number of Children	2.62±1.21
Days Breakfast is Eaten per Week	5.82±1.56



Conclusions

- Parents believe that serving their children breakfast is important and ensures children are able to focus in school and be well-behaved.
- Few parents mentioned the relationship between breakfast and weight management.
- Numerous barriers make it difficult for parents to ensure their school-aged children eat breakfast each morning.
- Parents overcame barriers by planning ahead, having grab-and-go options, and by serving non-traditional breakfast foods.
- Future nutrition education programs should help parents learn strategies to overcome breakfast barriers

