

Breakfast and ADHD

A guide for parents



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1. Why is a healthy breakfast so important?

- **The first meal of the day is the most important meal of the day.**

This is because waking up, your child will not have eaten for a number of hours and blood sugar levels will be low. This in itself can make people irritable. Eating a well balanced breakfast will provide 'fuel for the brain' as well as some essential vitamins and minerals for the day ahead.

- **Encourage your child to eat a well balanced breakfast.** This will encourage healthy eating for the rest of the day.

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Try and aim for one that isn't high in sugar. Sugary foods, like sugary cereals, raise blood sugar levels quickly, and that means a sudden burst of energy, but then they cause blood sugar levels to drop again quickly too. This can make people feel tired and grumpy - and hungry again very quickly.

- **Skipping breakfast can harm a child's growth and development.**

It can result in poor concentration, disruptive behaviour, inconsistent learning and fatigue. For a child with ADHD, skipping breakfast may make the problems even worse.



2. How can I encourage my child to have breakfast?

- Be a good example and eat breakfast yourself. Children are great mimics.
- Try and get up early enough to allow time for breakfast.
- Ideally, sit down to eat, but for children with concentration difficulties this may not be practical. Don't worry - the fact that they are eating something is what is important.
- You don't have to prepare elaborate breakfasts. Stick to simple, nutritious foods that are quick and easy to prepare and eat.

3. What should we include at breakfast?

A complete and balanced breakfast should provide 20-25% of daily calories. Just like other meals, try to eat a variety of foods including:

- **Grains (breads and cereals):** wholegrain bread, bagels, muffins, pancakes, waffles and porridge. Healthy cereals include Weetabix, Shreddies, Shredded Wheat, Granola and Muesli. These supply carbohydrates providing energy, vitamins, minerals and fibre. Cereals aimed at children often contain up to 50% sugar and are high in salt. Try to avoid these and provide the more healthy cereals like those listed above. However, if this is all they will eat, getting them to eat something is the main thing.
- **Protein:** eggs, baked beans, meat (for example sausage and bacon), nuts and seeds (for example peanut butter).
- **Fruit and vegetables:** fresh, tinned or dried; fruit juices; fruit smoothies. These provide carbohydrates, water, vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- **Milk, cheese and yogurt:** These provide protein, vitamins and minerals including calcium, vitamins A and D.

In addition, favourites like jam and honey - in moderate amounts - can add extra calories needed for energy.

4. Ideas for a quick-to-prepare breakfast

- Baked beans on toast with grated cheese on top.
- Cheese on toast or toasted sandwich. Try ham and cheese or cheese and tomato.
- Bowl of fruit salad topped with a pot of yogurt.
- Boiled egg and toast soldiers with butter and Marmite.
- Cereals with chopped fruit.
- Home made fruit smoothie or milkshake. Try banana or mango and strawberry.
- Poached or scrambled egg, maybe with added extra ingredients like tomato, mushrooms, cheese or ham.
- Eggy bread: dip bread in a beaten egg mixed with 2 tablespoons of milk and fry until golden.



Serve a glass of fresh fruit juice with breakfast. A pot of yogurt and fresh fruit could also be offered with any of the options above.

5. Tips for breakfast when time is short

- Serve Instant Porridge, to which you can add dried fruit, chopped banana and honey.
- A fruit smoothie could be shop bought to save time.
- Toast with either peanut butter, honey, jam, creamed cheese or marmite.
- Toasted bagel, muffin or crumpet with a favourite topping.
- Sandwiches and filled wraps can be good for breakfast too. They could be made the night before, ready to be grabbed in the morning.
- Offer a glass of milk if your child doesn't eat cereal.

Remember:

Getting your child to eat something for breakfast is what counts. Changing their current preferences to a healthier option may take a bit of time, but keep persevering!