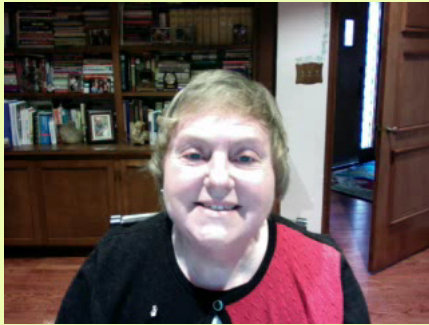


# **PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -**

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



## **ONE BENEFIT OF GOOD NUTRITION - IMPROVED BEHAVIOR and ACADEMICS**

We are learning so much about brain development in children of all ages - from in utero through adolescence (and even young adulthood). Optimal brain development obviously depends upon the proper nutritional environment - and with enhanced brain development comes improved behavior and learning potential.

Although we, as parents, instinctively know good nutrition is important for brain development, we often struggle with how to practically encourage our children to eat a healthy diet. And...with the government changing the definition of "healthy", what exactly should we be eating?

Common sense, combined with research findings, will help us. Today's newsletter will focus on the importance of a **healthy breakfast** - and how it may contribute to improved behavior and school performance.

A review of 36 articles researching the effects of breakfast on behavior and academic performance can be found at:  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3737458/>.

Although there are many variables that must be taken into consideration, including quality of breakfast eaten and socio-economic status, increased frequency of breakfast was positively associated with academic performance and improved "on task" behavior in the classroom.



### **IN UTERO and INFANCY**

#### **PARENTS: look at your eating habits**

One recent study of 1400 adults found that parents of young children were less likely to eat healthy meals than adults of the same age who were not parenting young children. The parents were also less likely to exercise.

*Are Parents of Young Children Practicing Healthy Nutrition and Physical Activity Behaviors?*  
Berge, JM, et al. *Pediatrics* 2011; 127:5 881-887

Given all the demands of parenting, it is easy to understand the results of this research study. However, now is the time to evaluate how you are caring for your own health.

The habits you form now will help



### **TODDLERS and PRESCHOOLERS**

Toddlers and preschoolers often "graze", so they seem to be constantly eating. Actually eating small amounts more frequently may be more healthy for all of us instead of eating large amounts at 2 - 3 meal times.

Although we as parents should never battle with our children over food, we can determine what foods we offer our children. Our responsibility is to purchase and offer healthy foods to our children. Then we can allow our children to decide what they eat and how much they eat.

**Breakfast - protein**



### **ELEMENTARY AGE**

#### **Don't forget breakfast - with protein**

Many studies have demonstrated that children who eat breakfast have improved math and reading achievement scores, are better able to pay attention in the classroom, and are less likely to be absent.

<http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf>

#### **Some ideas to help encourage breakfast:**

#### **Engage your children in choosing menus, shopping, and cooking**

A family night activity idea - Give everyone some recipes or cookbook or website and have each person choose a new healthy meal. This gives you the opportunity to discuss what are healthy foods. Your child can develop the grocery list so she is learning organizational skills, too.

Then cook the meal together - and enjoy a family meal!



### **ADOLESCENTS**

#### **Adolescents also benefit from breakfast.**

A study from Norway evaluated 2432 adolescents, 15 - 17 years old. High academic achievement was associated with regularly eating breakfast and lunch.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/829>

Another study from Great Britain of 750 teens 11 - 18 years of age involved standardized testing in the classroom after the teens had eaten or not eaten breakfast. Eating breakfast was correlated with improved academic performance as well as behavior.

<http://www.bps.org.uk/impact/impact-breakfast-academic-performance-cognitive-performance-and-behaviour-school-children>

#### **Glycemic load**

Use a family meal to discuss the benefits of breakfast with your teens.

you be a healthy role model for your children.

### **In utero**

Numerous studies have found beneficial effects for children when their mothers' prenatal diets were supplemented with omega 3 fatty acid / fish oil.

Unborn infants can taste various foods the mother has eaten and can remember those tastes later as toddlers. So, moms - eat your carrots while you are pregnant!

### **Infancy**

The numerous benefits of breastfeeding are well documented. For a thorough review, see Evergreen Perinatal Education, click on Outcomes of Breastfeeding versus Formula Feeding.

The benefits of breast feeding are maximized when the infant is exclusively breast fed for the first six months of life. Introduction of solid foods prior to this may increase the risk of obesity.

### **Breastfeeding and Behavior**

A few studies have researched the possible impact of breast feeding on childhood behavior and ADHD. One study of over 10,000 children found that those who were breastfed for at least 4 months had fewer behavioral problems at age 5 years.  
*"Breast feeding and Child Behavior in the Millenium Cohort Study" Arch Dis Child doi:10.1136/adc.2010.201970*

The beneficial effects of breakfast are best seen when children (and adults) eat protein so that their blood glucose levels are more likely to remain stable throughout the morning.

Consider the following protein additions to your breakfast menus:  
eggs  
peanut butter/almond butter  
nuts, especially almonds

### **Sugar**

Frequent spikes in blood sugar are unhealthy and may increase the later risk of obesity.

Decrease or eliminate the intake of sugar. For breakfast, eliminate the sugary cereals - even those that state they are "low fat" or suggest in other ways that they are healthy for your child.

Think of whole grains -

### **Snacks**

Limit your young child's intake of fruit juice and other sweetened drinks - or better yet, avoid these drinks all together. Not only do they have excessive sugar, but they may also have preservatives and artificial coloring agents that may be unhealthy for brain development.

Offer water frequently.

Schedule sit-down snack times as appropriate for your child's age and activity level. Offer mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks to your toddlers and preschoolers at regular times.

### **Offer a healthy variety of unprocessed foods.**

Serve foods from different food groups - especially fresh fruits and vegetables.

Toddlers may reject a certain food when first offered, but later will enjoy it - so keep offering the food in a calm, relaxed manner without pressure. Your toddler may surprise you by choosing this food as his favorite in a few months.

Toddlers seem to love

### **Choosing healthy foods**

Keep a food diary - write down your family meals, especially breakfast, for 3 - 4 days. Then take time to evaluate what you are actually eating to see where you can make changes.

Some children like to eat dinner's left overs for breakfast. This is often a great way to add protein to their breakfasts.

Can you -  
Add a fresh fruit to breakfast? Berries are a great source of anti-oxidants.

Offer plain Greek yogurt topped with nuts or fruit?

Make up a whole wheat burrito filled with beans, eggs, or cheese?

Add some ground flax seed or wheat germ to cereal?

Offer almond butter or peanut butter on whole grain toast?

Introduce the concept of glycemic index and load and show them how choosing the healthier foods with lower glycemic indexes will help them maintain their concentration during the school day.

There are many websites that discuss glycemic index and load. Here is one that lists specific foods:  
<http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=faq&dbid=32>

Note that most fruits and vegetables as well as nuts have lower glycemic indexes.

"white" foods or "carbs" such as crackers, bread and pasta - and seem to quickly identify "green" items on their plate as items to throw on the floor. Use whole grains whenever possible.

There are many "tricks" parents have used to encourage vegetable intake during this age.

Use common sense balanced with the principle of not battling over food. (See Family Meals newsletter for why meal times should be enjoyable for everyone.)

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