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Why Breakfast is So Important

Breakfast is called the most important meal of the day. According to survey research 93% of Americans agree with this idea but fewer than half (44%) actually eat breakfast! Reasons for skipping breakfast vary but the most common reasons given are a lack of time or appetite.

A great deal of research supports the importance of breakfast and shows that breakfast eaters:

- Are likely to have a lower body weight.
- Eat more “nutrient-dense” foods and food groups such as dairy, fruits and vegetables, as well as whole grains.
- Have higher intakes of vitamin D, potassium, calcium, and fiber.
- Are more alert, impacting both school and work performance.

With all these great reasons to eat breakfast, it seems like everyone would try to eat breakfast on most days. Since time is one of the primary reasons for skipping breakfast, here are some quick ways to include a fast, nutritious breakfast in your morning during National Breakfast Month – or any time.

- Take a few of your favorite cereals and make a breakfast mix of your own creation: add some dried fruit, almonds or walnuts for an even greater nutritional punch. Add milk or put into a go-cup and eat as a trail mix on your way – or even at – work or school.
- Make your own whole-grain peanut butter crackers for munching on your way to work or school.
- Have 100% juice boxes, milk boxes, or drinkable yogurts in the fridge and ready to grab.
- Breakfast can be leftovers from last night’s dinner: pasta, pizza, cold chicken will all work.
- Spread a peeled, sliced banana with nut butter and wrap in a tortilla warmed in the microwave for a tasty, nutritious way to wake up.
- Keep some higher protein breakfast bars on hand. Pair with a piece of fruit and low-fat or skim milk for some speedy nutrition.
- Spread a pita with peanut butter and jelly or honey – easy to eat while on the go.
- Make a smoothie the night before with fresh fruit and yogurt. Pour into glasses and put in the refrigerator. The next morning top the smoothies with some granola for a quick parfait.

References: IFIC Foundation Food & Health Survey, 2009 (NPD Group, 2011)

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Getting Your Grains at Breakfast

For thousands of years, grains have provided the backbone of the human diet. Wheat, corn, rice and oats are the most commonly consumed grains across the globe. Over the past 5,000 years, wheat in particular has provided important nutrients for civilizations over time.

Today, wheat foods include those made with enriched flour as well as whole grain. Enriched grain foods provide carbohydrates (a source of energy), and the same or greater amounts of B vitamins (thiamin, niacin, riboflavin) and iron as whole wheat products.

Enriched grains contain twice the amount of folic acid as whole grains. Since 1998, when the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) mandated folic acid fortification of enriched grains, the incidence of neural tube defects (NTDs) in the US has dropped 36 percent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named folic acid fortification of enriched grains as one of the top 10 public health achievements in the first decade of the 21st century.

Whole wheat products tend to have more fiber, vitamin E, magnesium and other nutrients found in the wheat kernel. Current dietary recommendations encourage people to eat half their grains as “whole” grains because they have been linked with a lower risk of heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. Whole grains include foods such as whole wheat, whole corn, oats, and additional grains such as quinoa, triticale or barley.

Breakfast is a great way to include both enriched and whole grains in your diet. Not only are wheat foods nutritious and delicious on their own, they are easily paired with other nutrient powerhouses like fruit and dairy sources like yogurt or milk, two food groups most people need to increase.

Many traditional and not-so-traditional breakfast foods provide grains. Here are examples of enriched and whole grain foods you can enjoy for breakfast during National Breakfast Month - or any time:

- **Whole grain toast or muffins with peanut butter and fresh berries**
- **Breakfast bars or cereals with cold, low-fat or skim milk**
- **Waffles or pancakes topped with sliced bananas and yogurt**
- **Leftover rice, pasta or tortillas with scrambled eggs and cheese**