

# Childhood Overweight

# focus:

# Breakfast

FOR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

VOLUME 2

Edited by Anne M. Fletcher, MS, RD



Anne M. Fletcher, MS, RD, is a registered dietitian and the author of best-selling books on weight management. Her latest book is *Weight Loss Confidential: How Teens Lose Weight and Keep It Off — and What They Wish Parents Knew* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007.)

**Among Ms. Fletcher's findings from more than 100 formerly overweight teens who lost weight and kept it off: the vast majority reported regularly eating breakfast and/or a morning snack.**

## Evidence supports link between breakfast skipping and overweight

A growing body of research shows an association between breakfast skipping and overweight in children and adolescents:<sup>1</sup>

- Most studies on the relationship between breakfast and body weight suggest that breakfast skipping is linked with increased BMI
- A recent study showed that fewer days eating breakfast during adolescence predicted increased BMI in young adulthood
- In teens with obese parents, eating breakfast was shown to be protective against overweight

It is unclear whether breakfast skipping plays a causative role in weight gain; more studies are needed. It may be that breakfast skipping leads to more snacking or to overeating later in the day. It may also be that routine breakfast eating leads to more regular eating and exercise patterns, healthful food choices, and consistent calorie intake, which all contribute to healthy body weight.

### Missed nutrients not made up

Studies show that breakfast skippers have lower intakes of numerous micronutrients, including vitamins A and C, calcium, riboflavin, zinc and iron, and are less likely to meet nutritional recommendations. Further, data indicate that these nutrient deficits tend not to be compensated for at later meals. Calcium intake is an especially critical nutritional need during adolescence, when bone accretion is highest.<sup>2</sup>

### Impact on cognition, academic performance

Research suggests that breakfast eating may improve cognitive function related to memory. Studies have also reported beneficial effects on test scores, grades, school attendance and tardiness rates.<sup>2</sup>

### Who's skipping?

Studies indicate that children and teens skip breakfast more often than any other meal. Those going without breakfast on any given day include:<sup>\*</sup>

**8%**

of 1- to 7-year-olds

**12%**

of 8- to 10-year-olds

**20%**

of 11- to 14-year-olds

**30%**

30% of 15- to 18-year-olds<sup>2</sup>

\*Most recent trend analysis published in 1998; current percentages likely to be higher.<sup>1,3</sup>

Overweight prevention and weight management

## Key counseling messages for parents, kids and teens

- 1. Don't skip breakfast.** There's too much at stake nutritionally, academically and, as the data suggest, weight-wise. If breakfast can't happen, kids should eat a healthy mid-morning snack.
- 2. Include these three components** in each breakfast:
  - high-fiber, whole-grain foods (e.g., oatmeal, whole-wheat bread)
  - a good source of protein (milk, yogurt, reduced-fat cheese, an egg)
  - whole fruit, instead of fruit juiceThis mix helps achieve satiety.<sup>4</sup>
- 3. Cut back on empty calories**, such as breakfast products high in added sugar and fat.
- 4. Pay close attention to portion sizes** on cereal boxes and other packaging.

## Cereal, nutrient intake and BMI

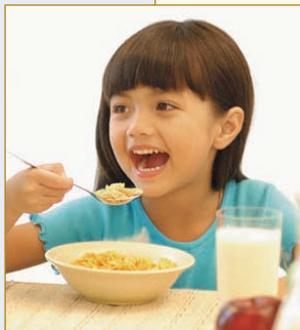
A number of studies in children and teens suggest that consuming ready-to-eat cereals is associated with higher daily intake of micronutrients and lower daily intake of fat.<sup>2</sup> Data also suggest a possible correlation between cereal consumption and lower BMI in adolescent girls.<sup>5</sup>

## On-the-go breakfasts can work

Some teens cite lack of time as one reason they skip breakfast. Acknowledging kids' hectic schedules, you may want to suggest healthy "grab-and-go" breakfast items, such as:

- Yogurt and yogurt drinks (brands with no-calorie sweetener)
- Whole-wheat toast with a light coating of peanut butter, small cartons of milk, reduced-fat cheese sticks
- Fresh fruit
- Dry whole grain cereal (separated into single-serving plastic bags)

Invite kids also to "think outside the cereal box." Non-breakfast foods, such as dinner leftovers or a sandwich, can fit the bill nutritionally.



Editor's Note

## Safety misperceptions, missed opportunities

Evidence confirms the safety of leading sugar alternatives, sucralose (SPLENDA® Brand Sweetener) among them. Yet in my experience, some parents and even some healthcare professionals sustain misperceptions about these products, and avoid using/recommending what can be a useful tool in managing kids' caloric intake. (Sugar alternatives help cut excess calories; they also can enhance palatability of healthful foods kids might not normally eat, such as high-fiber cereals.) As a registered dietitian and a mother, I am comfortable with no-calorie sweeteners as part of an overall healthy diet; my own children have grown up using these products.

— Anne M. Fletcher, MS, RD

*SPLENDA® Brand Sweetener can be used safely by the whole family, including children, women who are pregnant or nursing, and people with diabetes.*

*For data on the science and safety of sucralose, visit [www.splendaprofessional.com](http://www.splendaprofessional.com).*



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