

## Encouraging children to eat breakfast

### *The Health Sponsorship Council's Breakfast-eaters Promotion*

For many families breakfast-eating has been abandoned in the morning rush to get kids out the door to school. Each school week over 100,000 children aged five to 14 years miss breakfast at least one day of the week and parents are also skipping this meal.

Concerns about low rates of breakfast-eating and potential links to obesity and poor nutrition have prompted a new Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) initiative aimed at increasing the number of Māori and Pacific children and young people eating a healthy breakfast every day. This initiative also aims to increase understanding about the importance and benefits of eating breakfast every day.

HSC's *Breakfast-eaters* promotion will primarily consist of activities and messages for parents and caregivers of Māori and Pacific children aged 5 to 14 years. This is because research shows Māori and Pacific children are less likely to eat breakfast every day. The reason for communicating with parents and caregivers is that they play a key role in both modelling and encouraging healthy behaviours for their children, as well as doing the shopping for breakfast foods.

HSC is a government agency that promotes health and encourages healthy lifestyles.

### Why is HSC focusing on breakfast?

- Eating breakfast has many benefits. It can improve academic and physical performance, and is associated with less snacking and less weight gain.
- Each school week over 100,000 children (aged 5 to 14 years of age) skip breakfast at least one day of the week (18% of the age group).<sup>1</sup>
- 36,000 children never eat breakfast at home on a school day (6% of 5 to 14-year-olds).<sup>1</sup>
- Children who skip breakfast are more likely to buy energy-dense nutrient-poor food (ie, food high in fat and/or sugar, and low in other essential nutrients) to eat on the way to school.<sup>2</sup>
- Children of Pacific ethnicities are 5.7 times more likely and Māori children are 2.5 times more likely to skip breakfast than New Zealand European children or children from other ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Estimated from the 2007 Children's Food and Drinks survey (HSC, 2008) and the 2006 Census data.

<sup>2</sup> Utter, J., Scragg, R., Mhurchu, C. N., & Schaaf, D. (2007). At-home breakfast consumption among New Zealand children: Associations with body mass index and related nutrition behaviours. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 107, 570-576.

<sup>3</sup> Quigley, R., Taylor, R., & Scragg, R. (2007). *Is consuming breakfast important for academic performance, maintaining a healthy body weight, and improving nutrient and lifestyle habits in children?* A report prepared by the Scientific Committee of the Agencies for Nutrition Action.

## **More detail about HSC's Breakfast-eaters promotion**

HSC's recent consumer focus group work shows many parents know breakfast is important, but not why. Messages and activities will therefore communicate the importance and benefits of breakfast using media with high Māori and Pacific audiences – especially women's magazines and radio. Events such as Te Matatini National Kapahaka Festival and REAL Women's Duathlons will also be used to promote the breakfast messages.

The [www.feedingourfamilies.org.nz](http://www.feedingourfamilies.org.nz) website has been expanded to include a breakfast section ([www.breakfast-eaters.org.nz](http://www.breakfast-eaters.org.nz)), which provides information about the benefits of breakfast, as well as low-cost, easy breakfast ideas. Support materials, such as shopping pads, information leaflets and posters, are also available for order from the site.

### ***Breakfast-eaters messages***

#### **Breakfast-eaters have it better:**

- Give your kids a real head-start every day with breakfast.
- Eating breakfast gives kids the energy they need to learn and play better.
- Breakfast-eaters are more alert and have better concentration and memory.
- Breakfast-eaters have more energy to play sport.
- Breakfast-eaters are fuelled for sport and school.
- Breakfast doesn't have to be a battle. Breakfast can be fast, easy and low-cost.
- Hungry kids are cranky kids so give them a good breakfast for a great start to the day.
- Kids do what you do ... so if you eat breakfast, they will too! If your kids aren't keen on breakfast, try preparing it for them.
- Breakfast-eaters are less likely to snack on high-fat, high-sugar foods so eating breakfast is a good way to maintain a healthy weight.

## **Ideas about how you could get involved – HSC can support you in these activities**

- Include breakfast messages in your newsletters or newspaper columns/editorials.
- Disseminate breakfast messages or materials at events.
- Think about how breakfast messages could be incorporated into any existing programmes of your work.
- Include breakfast messages in back-to-school information for parents and caregivers.
- Send media releases containing breakfast messages to your local media to encourage breakfast eating in your community (HSC can provide template media releases if required).
- If you have a radio slot, share some breakfast messages with your listeners.
- If you are interviewed by your local media, try to include some breakfast messages in the information you provide.
- Put a link to [www.breakfast-eaters.org.nz](http://www.breakfast-eaters.org.nz) on your website.

### **For more information contact:**

Michelle Mako, Programme Manager – Nutrition and Physical Activity Programme  
Phone (04) 472 5777 or email [michelle@hsc.org.nz](mailto:michelle@hsc.org.nz)

## **Background research**

### ***Why is HSC focusing on parents and caregivers?***

Parents have been found to have a strong influence on children's eating habits (Brown et al, 2008; Pearson et al, 2009; Ritchie, 2005; Videon & Mannering, 2003). A longitudinal study by Keski-Rahkonen et al (2003) found the most significant factor relating to whether a child ate breakfast was whether the parents ate breakfast. Similarly, Cheng et al (2008) determined breakfast skipping in 10 to 14-year-old students was related to the perceived parental importance of breakfast and whether the child believed breakfast consumption improved concentration in class.

### ***Breakfast consumption can enhance academic and cognitive performance***

Mahoney et al (2005) tested no breakfast and two different types of cereal, and found in two samples of 30 children (6 to 8 years and 9 to 11 years of age) participants performed better after eating one of the two breakfasts compared to when they consumed no breakfast.

A review by Rampersaud et al (2005) found consumption of breakfast improved academic performance, school attendance and tardiness. Studies reviewed in these three areas tended to be randomised trials rather than cross-sectional studies.

### ***Eating breakfast has been shown to have a relationship with a lower body mass index (BMI)***

Of 2,184 participants surveyed once at childhood and once again at adulthood, lower BMI and waist circumference were observed in those who did not skip breakfast as a child or adult, compared to those who skipped breakfast both as an adult and child or just as an adult (Smith et al, 2010).

The Physicians' Health Study, a large scale longitudinal study of health professionals in the United States, found increased breakfast consumption at baseline was related to lower levels of weight gain and a lower risk of having a BMI greater than 25 up to 13 years after baseline (Bazzano et al, 2005). During 10 years of follow-up, the Health Professionals Follow-up Study found breakfast consumers were at lower risk of gaining five or more kilograms in weight (Van der Heijden et al, 2007).

### ***Increased fruit and vegetable consumption and decreased snack food consumption can be seen with breakfast eating***

Children who usually eat breakfast at home are approximately 20% more likely to eat 5+ a day fruits and vegetables, 24% more likely to drink milk, 31% more likely to eat toast, and 130% more likely to eat cereals, compared to children who sometimes or never eat breakfast at home.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the 'sometimes' or 'never' children are 68% more likely to eat sweets and lollies, 123% more likely to drink soft drinks, and 186% more likely to eat pies and sausage rolls than the 'always' children.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Utter et al (2007). Relative risk values calculated from Table 3 using unadjusted weighted percents.

## ***Eating more at breakfast time has been shown to increase physical performance***

Wyon et al (1997) tested the physical performance of 10-year-olds when they had consumed 20% of their daily energy needs from breakfast against when they had only consumed 10% of their daily energy needs. Children performed a physical running task better after consuming 20% of their energy intake from breakfast.

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