

Breakfast Can Be Important — Though Probably Not Most Important



By Ruth Kava — August 18, 2017



"Typical" British Breakfast

There's an old saying that "breakfast is the most important meal of the day" and that skipping breakfast can be a cause of obesity. But research has failed to support either meme, as we've [pointed out](#) ^[1] before. However, there apparently are some people for whom breakfast can be nutritionally important, according to [recent work](#) ^[2]. Who? Kids.

Dr. Janine D. Coulthard from King's College, London, and colleagues used data from the UK's National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling Programme — based on 4-day dietary records collected between 2008 and 2012. They analyzed nutrient intakes from these records for 802 children aged 4-10 years, and for 884 children aged 11-18 years, emphasizing fiber and micronutrient intakes. These children had a variety of breakfast habits, ranging from daily consumers through variable consumers to never consumers.

Factors associated with skipping breakfast every day included female sex (20 percent vs 15 percent of boys), older age (27 percent of 11-18 year olds, vs 7 percent of 4-10 year olds). Conversely, significantly more of the younger age group (45 percent) ate breakfast daily. Household income was yet another factor, with those from lower-income households being significantly more likely to skip breakfast every day.

Intake of folate, vitamin C, calcium, iodine and iron for each group of breakfasters was compared to the British reference nutrient intakes (RNI). The researchers found that the percentage of kids meeting the RNI for the different nutrients varied by whether or not they ate breakfast. While the percent of every day breakfast consumers who met the RNIs for folate, vitamin C, calcium, iron and iodine were 82, 91, 76, 59 and 94 percent respectively, the same nutrient goals for those who

ate no breakfast were met by only 43, 74, 32, 19 and 31 percent respectively. Further, when the investigators compared nutrient intakes on days when intermittent breakfast consumers did and didn't eat breakfast, they found that, as one might expect, intakes of calcium, fiber, folate, vitamin C and iodine were higher on the days the kids ate breakfast. This was true only for the lower age group.

They did not find that breakfast skippers tended to overeat the rest of the day — thus not supporting the hypothesis that skipping breakfast would lead to overweight and obesity. Unfortunately, it was obvious that breakfast skippers did not make up for the nutrients they might have consumed if they had eaten breakfast.

They concluded:

this study adds to the existing body of data linking breakfast consumption with higher quality dietary intake in school-age children, particularly the 4–10 years age group, supporting the promotion of breakfast as an important element of a healthy dietary pattern in children.

It's certainly possible that foods consumed outside of breakfast could make up for the deficits observed in the current analysis — but whether or not that occurs is obviously going to depend on food choices made at those times, and thus speak to the importance of educating children and parents about choosing nutrient-rich foods.

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Links

[1] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/05/23/breakfast-skippers-this-ones-for-you>

[2] https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/745D1FB56963531AA0E6165D95BDC93F/S0007114517001714a.pdf/breakfast_consumption_and_