

What are the effects of adolescents skipping breakfast?

This extensive research focused on the topic of adolescents skipping breakfast. There were a number of key findings discovered that influenced the direction of the research. These findings included the specific group of adolescents who most commonly skipped breakfast, the reasons why adolescents skip breakfast, the effects of skipping breakfast and the most effective solution to this issue. *Good clear direction*

WHO SKIPS BREAKFAST

The following paragraphs will explore which factors are able to identify the specific group of adolescents skipping breakfast most often. 1 in 4 adolescents regularly skip breakfast¹. Furthermore, the percentage of students who skip breakfast has increased over the past six years². A key finding from surveys³ was that gender is the most significant factor in identifying the regular adolescents who skipped breakfast. Females skipped at a rate twice that of males⁴. This is related to female adolescents worrying more about their body shape⁵ and as a result seeing breakfast skipping as a means of weight loss⁶. Skipping breakfast can diminish growth and prevent an adequate intake of vitamins and minerals⁷. Excessive concern over body image and skipping meals regularly can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa⁸ and bulimia nervosa⁹. In summary, research has found that females are more commonly skipping breakfast, primarily due to figure consciousness. *Good synthesis & substitution.*

Whether teenagers ate breakfast in the company of their family or friends was another determining factor¹⁰. Those who often or almost always skipped breakfast frequently ate breakfast alone meanwhile those who almost never skipped breakfast generally ate breakfast in the company of members of their family¹¹. In Australian culture, unlike lunch and especially dinner, there isn't a significant emphasis on a family sitting together for breakfast¹². If adolescents do not feel a social pressure to eat breakfast¹³ then it may be skipped all together¹⁴.

In a census conducted across Australian schools in 2011, it was shown that students from Northern Territory skipped breakfast most often - at a rate twice of Victoria and Western Australia¹⁵. Additionally, the percentage of students who ate breakfast decreased as the students age increased¹⁶. Research showed that

¹ Gould w, 1997, 'The Science of Breakfast', Business in Action: Kellogg's, Cherrytree Press Ltd, Bath, pp.26-27.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, 'What Students Had for Breakfast', Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia, Australia, www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/CaSHome.nsf/Home/CensusAtSchool+Data+Time+Series#Anchor10, accessed 21 April 2012.

³ Surveys conducted at Heritage College on the 8/3/12.

⁴ Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

⁵ Interview with Marika Tigermann on 24/3/12.

⁶ Interview with Karen Magee on the 5/3/12.

⁷ Tamborlane, W, 1997, 'Eating Out, Eating Late and Cooking', Children's Nutrition, Yale University, USA, pp.72-73.

⁸ Interview with Tracey Wade on 24/3/12.

⁹ Lecture at the Flinders University School of Psychology on the 24/3/12.

¹⁰ Smolin L & Grosvenor M, 2003, 'Breakfast: Nutrition for Learning', Nutrition Science and Applications, John Wiley & Sons Inc, USA, pp.428-429.

¹¹ Surveys conducted at Heritage College on the 8/3/12.

¹² Interview with Emma Donaghey on the 15/5/12.

¹³ Abbott, RA, Macdonald, D, Stubbs, CO, Mackinnon, L, Harper, C & Davies, PSW 2007, 'Meal Habits', The State of Queensland, www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/hpu/32848.pdf, accessed 21 April 2012.

¹⁴ Interview with Julia Boase on 11/5/12.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, 'What Students Had for Breakfast by State/Territory', Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia, Australia, www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/CaSHome/2011+CensusAtSchool+Summary+Data#Table12, accessed 11 April 2012

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010, 'Percentage of students who ate breakfast food/s on the day of the questionnaire by year level', Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia, Australia,

a typical adolescent to skip breakfast would be a female senior student from Northern Territory who generally ate alone.

REASONS FOR SKIPPING BREAKFAST

To understand this issue further, the reasons why these adolescents are skipping breakfast needed to be investigated. A key finding was that adolescents were shown to skip breakfast most commonly as a result of a lack of time in the morning¹⁷. Interviews¹⁸ found this was because these adolescents were leading busy lives during their school life¹⁹ and fell into a sleeping pattern of late nights and consequently later mornings²⁰. Adolescents are often involved in extra curricula activities such as sports and music as well as part-time jobs²¹. The second most common reason was lack of hunger²², however, many dieticians²³ believe that our bodies should be hungry in the morning as the body has been starved for a whole night²⁴, hence the term 'breakfast' or 'break the fast'²⁵. Adolescents need to retrain their bodies to feel hungry by encouraging a habit of eating breakfast²⁶. Other reasons²⁷ for skipping breakfast included feeling unwell²⁸, not liking the food available²⁹ and dieting, generally more common in females³⁰. Thus, there are many reasons why an adolescent might skip breakfast, with poor time management, lack of hunger and weight consciousness listed as the most common.

Excellent synthesis.

THE EFFECTS OF SKIPPING BREAKFAST

There are many physiological and psychological effects that may be experienced by someone who skips breakfast regularly. A key finding was that the most significant effect of skipping breakfast was shown to be on cognitive ability³¹ – especially a worse memory in the short term³², than those who consume breakfast. This is because as adolescents sleep, their body's glucose reserves are used up. If adolescents then skip breakfast they will have low blood glucose levels³³ which is associated with a decrease in memory function³⁴. Performance at sport is also significantly affected³⁵ as adolescents are not supplying their bodies with foods that act as a source of energy³⁶. Additionally, skipping breakfast has shown to have an adverse effect on an adolescent's mood³⁷ – as those who skipped breakfast often felt irritable³⁸, grumpy³⁹ and anti-social⁴⁰.

www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/CaSHome.nsf/Home/2010+CensusAtSchool+Summary+Data#breakfast, accessed 20 April 2012.

¹⁷ Surveys conducted at Heritage College on the 8/3/12.

¹⁸ Interview with Emma Donaghey on the 15/5/12.

¹⁹ Yeager S, 1998, 'Fatigue – what to eat when you are feeling beat', Food Remedies, Rodale Inc, USA, pp.193-194.

²⁰ Sunderland M, 2006, 'Reason One: Tiredness & Hunger', The Science of Parenting, DK Publishing, New York, USA, pp.113, 254-255.

²¹ Tamborlane, W, 1997, 'Eating Out, Eating Late and Cooking', Children's Nutrition, Yale University, USA, pp.72-73.

²² Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

²³ Interview with Karen Magee on the 5/3/12

²⁴ Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, 2003, 'Nutrition the Inside Story', Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, Macquarie, ACT p.110.

²⁵ Beale L & Couvillon S, 2003, 'Your Body of Information', Weight Loss, Pearson Education Inc, USA, pp.70-71, 110-111, 272-273.

²⁶ Interview with Karen Magee on the 5/3/12.

²⁷ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

²⁸ Surveys conducted at Heritage College on the 8/3/12.

²⁹ Interview with Lisa Ansell on the 1/5/12.

³⁰ Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

³¹ Wardlaw G, 1999, 'Nutrition basics', Perspectives in Nutrition, WCB McGraw, USA, pp.16-23.

³² Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

³³ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

³⁴ Wahlquist M, 2002, 'Breakfast and Cognition'. Food & Nutrition, Allen and Unwin, Australia, p.489.

³⁵ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

³⁶ Hunninghake, R & Challem J, 2007, Importance of Eating Breakfast, Youtube Video, Centre for the Improvement of Human Functioning, USA.

³⁷ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

Adolescents who skip breakfast are shown to be more likely to be apathetic⁴¹, inattentive and disruptive at school⁴². In many of these^{43,44} looking at the relationship between school performance and eating breakfast it has been found that breakfast eaters perform better in arithmetic tests specifically⁴⁵. Skipping breakfast also leads to a lack of concentration⁴⁶ which can detrimentally affect efficiency⁴⁷ at school. As well as this, breakfast skippers are not stimulating their bowels in the mornings and are therefore more likely to be constipated⁴⁸. Furthermore, skipping breakfast often leads to cravings in the late morning and the convenient snacks chosen are often unhealthy⁴⁹. Replacing breakfast with coffee, and other stimulants, which tend to reduce fatigue and drowsiness only serve this purpose temporarily and are not a healthy option⁵⁰. Caffeine can cause an upset stomach, insomnia, anxiety and palpitations and withdrawal symptoms can include craving and headaches⁵¹. Skipping breakfast causes a variety of negative physiological and psychological consequences which may be summarised as decreasing general health and a person's overall feeling of wellbeing.

Excellent synthesis & substantiation

A nutritious breakfast should contain many vitamins⁵², be high in protein⁵³, fibre and complex carbohydrates⁵⁴ and low in fat, sugar⁵⁵ and sodium⁵⁶. Those who are eating a breakfast to these guidelines generally have a lower risk of breast, colon and oesophageal cancer than those who skip breakfast or choose an unhealthy option⁵⁷. A nutritious breakfast has also been shown to boost your immune system⁵⁸. Choosing breakfasts with wholegrain foods provide long-lasting energy as they contain bran, germ and endosperm of the grain kernel⁵⁹. In fact, studies have shown that eating a wholegrain breakfast cereal each day reduces the risk of premature death⁶⁰. Breakfast skippers are shown to have higher cholesterol levels⁶¹ and worse diets overall than those who consume breakfast regularly⁶². In addition to this, adolescents who skip breakfast are more likely to obese in the long term, as the body burns up breakfast more efficiently than meals eaten later

³⁸ Government of South Australia – Health Department 2010, 'Children's Health Mood and Behaviour – the Importance of Breakfast', SA Health, South Australia, www.health.sa.gov.au/pehssrer-award/breakfast-for-children.pdf, accessed 20 April 2012

³⁹ Focus group conducted at Heritage College on 15/5/12.

⁴⁰ Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, 2003, 'Nutrition the Inside Story', Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, Macquarie, ACT p.110.

⁴¹ Holderhead S, 2012, 'Cooking up Enthusiasm', The Advertiser, May 2012, p.42.

⁴² Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

⁴³ Simeon, D & Grantham-McGregor S, 1989, 'Effects of Missing Breakfast on the Cognitive Functions of School Children of Differing Nutritional Status', PhD thesis, The American Journal of Nutrition, USA.

⁴⁴ Khan A, 2000, 'The Relationship between Breakfast, Academic Performance and Vigilance in School Aged Children', PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

⁴⁵ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

⁴⁶ Crothers B, 2011, 'Which breakfast is best?', Australian Healthy Food Guide, Healthy Life Media, Australia, pp.36-40.

⁴⁷ Wardlaw G, 1999, 'Nutrition basics', Perspectives in Nutrition, WCB McGraw, USA, pp.16-23.

⁴⁸ Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, 2003, 'Nutrition the Inside Story', Home Economics Institute of Australia Inc, Macquarie, ACT p.110.

⁴⁹ Interview with Karen Magee on the 5/3/12.

⁵⁰ Crothers B, 2011, 'Which breakfast is best?', Australian Healthy Food Guide, Healthy Life Media, Australia, pp.36-40.

⁵¹ Tamborlane, W, 1997, 'Eating Out, Eating Late and Cooking', Children's Nutrition, Yale University, USA, pp.72-73.

⁵² Hark L & Darwin D, 2007, 'Don't Skip Breakfast', Cardiovascular Disease and Nutrition, Nutrition Australia, Australia, pp.14,219.

⁵³ Women's and Children's Health Network 2011, 'Breakfast – a great way to start the day!', Government of South Australia – SA Health, South Australia, www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=284&id, accessed 15 May 2012.

⁵⁴ Setori, T, 2008, 'Healthy Food Choices', Grains Bread, Cereal & Pasta, Macmillan Education, South Yarra, pp.16-17.

⁵⁵ Van Sunder, T 2009, 'Skipping Breakfast: Don't Do It!', Youtube Video, Flying Squirrel Media, Washington.

⁵⁶ Ballard, C 2006, 'Menu for One Week', Food For Feeling Healthy, Heinemann Library, Great Britain, pp. 50-51.

⁵⁷ Gould, W 1997, 'The Science of Breakfast', Business in Action: Kellogg's, Cherrytree Press Ltd, Bath, pp26-27.

⁵⁸ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

⁵⁹ Setori, T, 2008, 'Healthy Food Choices', Grains Bread, Cereal & Pasta, Macmillan Education, South Yarra, pp.16-17.

⁶⁰ Radd S, 2003, 'Improve Your Child's School Performance', The Breakfast Book, Hodder Headline, Australia, pp.1-148.

⁶¹ Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

⁶² Gould w, 1997, 'The Science of Breakfast', Business in Action: Kellogg's, Cherrytree Press Ltd, Bath, pp.26-27.

in the day⁶³. Therefore, it has been clearly shown that breakfast is crucial for those adolescents wanting to lead a healthy and happy life, with serious adverse effects in the short and long term by those who skip it.

Grant Synthesis

THE SOLUTION

The solution to adolescents skipping breakfast, most often found in the United States where the main reason for this issue involves poverty⁶⁴, was said to be breakfast programs⁶⁵. It was found that these breakfast programs needed to be non-selective⁶⁶ so social issues such as bullying are avoided. Australia has only introduced breakfast programs in the last ten years⁶⁷ and they are not as common⁶⁸. This is because the most common reasons for skipping breakfast in Australia include personal choice and convenience - rather than poverty⁶⁹. A key finding was that breakfast programs were not a sustainable option⁷⁰ and instead of attempting to find a cure, a prevention needs to be sought first. This finding led to research that showed the most effective prevention method would be parents educating their children from a young age on the importance of breakfast⁷¹ as well as enforcing a morning routine⁷². Adolescents need nutritional education as they grow older⁷³, obtain their driving license and have the opportunity to take the responsibilities of buying groceries for the family and making healthy choices⁷⁴. Companies have produced 'on-the-go' products⁷⁵ in response to 'lack of time' being the main reason for adolescents skipping breakfast. These can be a good compromise⁷⁶ for breakfast as they are convenient and have a long shelf life. Whilst they can be high in kilojoules, they do also provide some nutrients and fibre⁷⁷. Additionally, the government and breakfast companies are able to launch campaigns⁷⁸ emphasizing the importance of a healthy breakfast to lower the amount of adolescents skipping breakfast and thus lowering the resultant consequences also. Advertisements need to highlight the aspect of increased energy or better weight control and other factors that are attractive and appropriate for adolescents.⁷⁹ It can be seen therefore, that researchers, breakfast companies and schools are endeavouring to improve this issue by introducing breakfast programs, advertising campaigns and a stronger focus on nutrition education⁸⁰.

Excellent Synthesis.

Through the extensive collection and subsequent in-depth analysis of many primary and secondary sources, the considerable effects of adolescents skipping breakfast were found. These effects were discovered to be overwhelming negative and for optimal performance physically and mentally, adolescents should avoid skipping breakfast.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Shaw, M 1998, 'Adolescent Breakfast Skipping: An Australian Study', PhD thesis, Flinders University, Australia.

⁶⁵ Australia Red Cross 2012, 'Good Start Breakfast Club', Australia Red Cross, Australia, [www.redcross.org.au/files/GSBC\(3\).pdf](http://www.redcross.org.au/files/GSBC(3).pdf), accessed 9 April 2012

⁶⁶ Watkins, S. 1999, 'Breakfast and Learning in Children', PhD thesis, Centre for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Washington, USA.

⁶⁷ Holderhead S, 2011, 'School Breakfast Clubs Boost Students Learning Curve', News Limited, Australia, www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/school-breakfast-clubs-boost-students-learning-curve/, accessed 6 March 2012

⁶⁸ Watkins, S. 1999, 'Breakfast and Learning in Children', PhD thesis, Centre for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Washington, USA.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Interview with Leanne Rana on the 4/5/12.

⁷¹ Australia Red Cross 2012, 'Determining whether your school needs a Breakfast Program' Australian Red Cross, Australia, [www.redcross.org.au/files/Fact_sheet_1_\(2\).pdf](http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Fact_sheet_1_(2).pdf), accessed 9 April 2012

⁷² Interview with Leanne Rana on the 4/5/12.

⁷³ Interview with Nestle on the 28/3/12.

⁷⁴ Tamborlane, W, 1997, 'Eating Out, Eating Late and Cooking', Children's Nutrition, Yale University, USA, pp.72-73.

⁷⁵ Weatherwax, D & Weiss S, 2003, 'Breakfast on the Go', Sports Nutrition, Alpha Books, USA, pp.199, 274.

⁷⁶ Crothers B, 2011, 'Which breakfast is best?', Australian Healthy Food Guide, Healthy Life Media, Australia, pp.36-40.

⁷⁷ Interview with Karen Magee on the 9/2/12.

⁷⁸ Wardlaw G, 1999, 'Nutrition basics', Perspectives in Nutrition, WCB McGraw, USA, pp.16-23.

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Surveys

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Focus Groups

- Focus group conducted at Heritage College on the 15/5/12.

Lectures

- Lecture attended at the Flinders University School of Psychology on the 24/3/12.

Interviews

- Interview with Karen Magee on 5/3/12.
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- Interview with Tracey Wade on 24/3/12.
- Interview with Nestle on 28/3/12.
- Interview with Lisa Ansell on 1/5/12.
- Interview with Leanne Rana on 4/5/12.
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