

# 5 SURPRISING REASONS YOUNG SWIMMERS SHOULD EAT BREAKFAST

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**BY JILL CASTLE, MS, RDN**

Is your swimmer a breakfast eater or a breakfast skipper? Research tells us that 8 to 12 percent of all school-aged kids skip breakfast, and by the time they enter the teen years, as many as 20 to 30 percent of them have completely given up the morning meal.

According to a 2008 study in *Pediatrics*, kids and teens that ate a daily breakfast had a lower body mass index (a measurement of weight status in relation to height) than those who occasionally ate breakfast or skipped it all together.

This dietitian wants the young swimmer to eat breakfast. Here are my

reasons why:

## **Breakfast provides approximately 20-30% of the swimmer's daily nutrient intake.**

Eating a daily breakfast means young swimmers have a better shot at meeting their nutrient needs on a daily basis, and less pressure to eat and meet those nutrient needs later on in the day. For example, including fruits and veggies in the morning meal means swimmers don't have to play catch-up at the mid-day meal or at dinner (which seems to be the case for many athletes).

Swimmers can also target key nutrients such as fiber, calcium and vitamin D quite easily by eating fruit, whole grain breads and cereals, or dairy and non-dairy substitutes such as milk, soymilk, yogurt, eggs, or fortified cereals, respectively.

## **Breakfast helps swimmers meet their high calorie needs.**

Young swimmers generally require more calories than the non-swimmer due to the nature of swimming, a high calorie-burning sport. If the swimmer skips breakfast, he may miss out on some serious calories (a third of the day's provision from meals) and need to make these up throughout the day. Remember, calories aren't just for sport, they are for growth and development, as well. In looking for inconsistent calories throughout the day, the young swimmer who isn't gaining weight or growing well is often missing a substantial breakfast.

## **Breakfast initiates the appetite cycle, which is key to being able to regulate eating.**

The appetite cycle helps kids and teens (and adults) tune in to when to eat and when to stop eating. For example, the swimmer feels hunger, and the swimmer eats; the swimmer feels full or satisfied, and the swimmer stops eating. Setting this cycle in motion has a key benefit according to the research: it helps reduce overeating later in the day.

The biggest predictor of overeating is under eating. Ironically, some swimmers skip breakfast because they think it will help control their weight or prevent weight gain. However, studies show that skipping meals, particularly breakfast, is tied to overeating and unwanted weight gain.

## **Breakfast raises blood sugar after an overnight fast.**

Sleeping for seven to nine hours a night (hint: that's the desirable amount of sleep for growing kids and teens) means that the body has been fasting. Eating a breakfast raises blood sugar levels and sends energy to the brain and other cells within the body. It's like priming the pump on an engine or turning on the ignition in a car. The brain and body receive an injection of energy, which means attention, focus and memory are heightened and the body is energized for motion.

## **Breakfast may calm the tummy.**

While sleeping, stomach acids accumulate leading some kids and teens to wake up feeling nauseous or too sick to eat in the morning. But eating can help. Food in the tummy acts as a sponge, sopping up stomach acids and quelling that sick feeling.

If ever you doubt the importance of breakfast for the swimmer, remember this: breakfast adds nutrition, primes the brain and body for learning and activity, and sets regulated eating in motion—all good things for the growing swimmer!

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