

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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If you're sending children off to school these days, give their brains a good start with some breakfast before they go. Or at least get them there on time to get the free breakfast all schools provide. Ever since the 1950's there has been plenty of research showing that children who eat breakfast learn faster and remember longer.

It does make sense. The brain needs glucose, blood sugar, to work properly. After a night's sleep, 6 or 8 hours without food, there's very little sugar left in the blood. So eating something to get some sugar circulating will wake the brain up and get it ready to work.

Now research is trying to figure out what kinds of foods are best for getting the brain in gear. Does it surprise you to hear that sugary breakfast cereals are not coming out on top of the list? All that sugar will go into the blood quickly. That would be okay, except that it gets used up quickly and blood sugar goes down again very quickly. An hour or two after a sugary cereal breakfast, blood sugar is almost as low as it was before breakfast. That means the brain is not getting fed, and not working well.

As blood sugar goes down, hormones that effect mood may be released. Of course children's moods affect how they act and behave in school. Changing sugar levels can change moods, and might change behavior. Children's moods can have a big effect on their ability to concentrate on learning too. Less change would be better for children and teachers.

On the other hand, eating a whole grain cereal such as oatmeal, even though it

has the same amount of sugar, has a very different effect on the brain and blood sugar. All the fiber in oatmeal slows down how fast the sugar can be absorbed. That means the sugar levels in blood go up slowly but stay up a lot longer. That means the brain operates better for longer. It also means there are likely to be fewer changes in mood and behavior.

Researchers at Tufts University recently gave elementary school children either oatmeal or a popular sweetened cereal for breakfast. Both had the same amount of sugar. After breakfast the children were asked to study maps and then list as many countries from the maps as they could. The kids who ate oatmeal remembered 20% more countries than the other children. Other studies have used other measures of learning and memory, both with words and numbers. Breakfast eaters do better.

But do you have to try to force-feed your children oatmeal? Of course not! There are lots of other choices. Breakfast should have some whole grains, some protein and a little fat. Where you get those things is up to you and your children. For example, peanut butter and jelly on whole wheat toast is quick and easy to prepare and to eat on the way out the door. A low-fat granola bar and a hard boiled egg is another good combination. Or stir granola into low fat yogurt with fruit. If they turn their noses up at all of that, hand them a slice of left-over pizza from dinner last night as they go out the door!

If you can make time to heat something up, make a packet or two of instant oatmeal with low fat milk. Stir some fresh or canned fruit into it for flavor, or even a spoonful of jam, and sprinkle some nuts on top for crunch. Or make a breakfast burrito. Scramble an egg, stir in some salsa, wrap it in a tortilla or tuck it into a pita pocket. Just get something into them before they hit the school door!

Here's a recipe for a healthy cheese 'Danish' you can make in minutes. This recipe makes two 'Danishes', but they're so good you might have to make 2 for each person. You can use sliced or diced peaches, nectarines or other fruit according to your family's tastes or what's in season. Enjoy!

#### Low-Fat Fresh Danish

½ C low fat or fat free cottage or ricotta cheese	1/4 tsp vanilla extract
½ C crushed pineapple, canned in its own juice	1/4 tsp cinnamon or nutmeg
2 slices whole wheat bread	

Toast bread. Drain pineapple. Mix cheese, fruit and spices. Divide and spread on toast. Warm in toaster oven or under broiler until heated through. Serves 2.

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