
Back to School the Healthy Way: Using Breakfast as your Medicine

By Cristi Lewis, CHom.

The excitement of going back to school has begun! So have the change of seasons and an increase in activity and stress in our home lives. The convergence of these factors often means the start of the cold and flu season for our kids. So how can we best prepare our children to have a healthy school year and lower those doctor bills this fall season? It begins at the breakfast table each day. Simple steps in preparing a nutritious breakfast for our kids can give them a great start to the school day and keep their immunity levels high. Including one each of the following foods in their breakfasts can mean all the difference between alert, happy students and distracted, hyperactive kids:

1) Think whole foods. While those sugary cereals and toaster pastries may be quick and easy for tired and stressed moms to get the kids out the door, they don't give kids what they need to grow, much less learn. Foods high in sugar and refined flour are digested and absorbed very quickly by the body. This means that they will experience a "rush" of energy for maybe an hour before they run out of fuel. This energy "high" followed by the "low" is very hard on kids' bodies and may lead to distracting behaviors in the classroom, hampering their ability to learn. Whole grain foods take longer in the body to break down and release their energy, giving kids a constant, steady supply of fuel that lasts much longer and does not lead to the mood swings associated with refined sugar and flour. Switching your breakfast cereal to granola, oatmeal, or muesli can be just as quick to prepare and gives much better fuel to your child's body. Whole wheat toast with peanut butter and honey is also a great toaster treat.

2) Protein and fat. It takes a lot of protein to grow as rapidly as school-age children do. Both their body and minds need a certain amount of animal protein and fat in order to grow the neurological connections associated with learning and keep them from feeling hungry in the middle of the morning. Eggs are great in the morning, and the busy mom can have a supply of boiled eggs in the fridge if there is no time to cook breakfast. Yogurt is yummy on its own or combined with breakfast cereal, and whole milk is better than reduced fat or skim in providing the needed protein and fat in their diets (provided they aren't allergic to dairy products and are used in moderation). Nut butters on toast (peanut, almond, soy) are a great alternative to meat products and provide essential omega fats especially used to build nerve tissue. Even sliced avocado on eggs is a great way to get protein and healthy fat in kids' diets. Avoid fatty processed meats such as sausage and bacon, as they contain little usable protein and artery-clogging fats that do nothing to promote healthy brain function.

3) Raw foods. So much of the American diet is cooked that we often go days without eating anything fresh and raw. But raw foods contain active enzymes

from the once-living plant. These enzymes help to digest foods after we eat them, leading to better absorption and healthier digestive systems. They also contain fiber which promotes healthy intestinal flora, a key component in our immune systems. Raw fruits and vegetables also contain minerals and vitamins our bodies and immune systems need that may be destroyed in the cooking process. Include a piece of fresh fruit at the breakfast table. Be careful with juices – most you buy from the store have been pasteurized, which destroys the active enzymes and many vitamins. Unpasteurized juices or juicing your own apples, carrots, or oranges ahead of time can be a quick substitute for the busy family.

4) Supplementation. If you just find it too hard to include one of each of the above foods in breakfast, then nutritional supplements are a must. A good multivitamin plus an omega supplement is a good nutritional foundation for children. However, please avoid those chewable tablets that contain refined sugar and artificial flavors and colors - they kind of miss the point! Visit a health food store to find multivitamins made from concentrated whole foods – the body can assimilate these nutrients much better than chemicals made in a lab. Many multivitamins now come in the form of a powdered drink additive, which can be used to make your own smoothies in the morning, and what kid can resist that? Omega 3 and 6 should come from cod liver oil capsules or flaxseed oil, which can easily be added to those smoothies and often come in great flavors kids don't mind taking.

It's not hard to give busy kids a good start to the day, but it does take some thought and creativity. Including a whole grain, a protein/fat, and a raw food in their breakfast is a great way to keep their bodies strong and healthy. By thinking of your breakfast food as medicine, not only will your family be healthier throughout the winter, but your kids may just bring home better grades!

About the Author:

Cristi Lewis, CHom. is a classical homeopath (and a mom!) specializing in children's holistic care. She resides in Julian and practices in the Back Country communities. She can be reached through her website at www.highroadhomeopathy.com.