

Children who skip breakfast may not be getting recommended nutrients

August 16 2017

A study by researchers at King's College London has found that children who skip breakfast regularly may not be consuming the daily amounts of key nutrients for growth and development that are recommended by the UK government.

Children who ate breakfast every day were deemed to have overall superior nutritional profiles compared to those who didn't. While the study was unable to identify a causal link, these children were found to have higher daily intakes of key nutrients such as folate (important for the development of genetic material), calcium, iron and iodine (key in the development of thyroid function) than children who skipped breakfast.

The team of researchers used food diaries collected for the National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling programme between 2008 and 2012 from a group of 802 children aged 4 - 10 years and 884 children aged 11 - 18 years. Nutrient intake was assessed using a food composition databank from the Department of Health. Breakfast was considered as consumption of over 100 calories between 6 and 9am.

Key findings include:

- 31.5 per cent of those who skipped breakfast did not meet even the lower recommended [nutrient intake](#) (LRNI) of iron compared to only 4.4 per cent of breakfast consuming children
- 19 per cent did not meet LRNI for calcium, compared to 2.9 per

cent of breakfast consuming children

- 21.5 per cent did not meet lower levels for iodine, compared to 3.3 per cent of breakfast consuming children
- No children who consumed breakfast daily had a folate intake below their LRNI compared to 7.3 per cent of those who skipped breakfast

The study, published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* and conducted with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, also compared breakfast habits and nutrients within individual participants. This analysis showed that, in younger children (4-10 years old), on days when breakfast was consumed, children had higher intakes of folate, calcium, vitamin C and iodine compared to their breakfast-skipping days. Out of these same nutrients, for older children (11-18 years old) only calcium intakes were higher on breakfast-consuming days.

Authors have attributed these findings to higher levels of parental control over eating habits at a young age. There is also the possibility of mis-reporting in [food diaries](#), particularly in older children who reported their own intakes. Some analyses were repeated to omit implausible levels of energy intake where possible.

Dr Gerda Pot, senior author of the study and Lecturer in Nutritional Sciences at King's College London said: 'This study provides evidence that breakfast is key for parents to ensure that their children are getting the nutrition they need.'

'Further studies that investigate specific foods and dietary quality would help to identify if the differences are due to the different types of breakfast being eaten by different age groups, as well as provide more insight into the impact of breakfast on dietary quality overall.'

The study also showed that only 6.5 per cent of 4 - 10 year olds missed

breakfast every day, compared with nearly 27 per cent of 11- 18 year olds. Data also suggested that girls were more likely to miss breakfast than boys and household income was found to be higher in the families of children eating [breakfast](#) every day.

More information: *British Journal of Nutrition* (2017). [DOI: 10.1017/S0007114517001714](#)

Provided by King's College London

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