



Breakfast makes the grade

STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND PHOTOS PROVIDED

There is a relationship between eating a good breakfast and strong academic performance, according to the professionals interviewed for this article, including moms, who are experts in observing their own children. When it comes to breakfast, think protein, protein, protein.

“Ideally, a high-protein breakfast sustains children better than cereals or other foods that are high in sugar,” says pediatrician Dr. Linda Froberg, of Froberg Pediatrics in Lafayette. “In my experience, a good breakfast correlates with being able to pay attention, feeling better and academic performance.”

Today, primary and secondary school students are faced with many standardized tests — ISTEP being just one type — and the testing is another reason to get into the routine of eating a good breakfast.

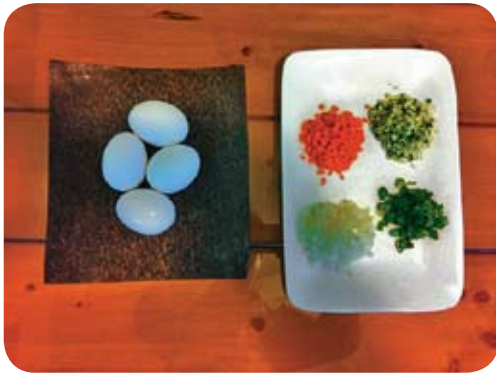
A high-protein breakfast doesn't have to be elaborate or time consuming. There are many quick and easy alternatives, Froberg says. You can find egg-and-cheese sandwiches in the frozen-food aisle at the grocery store, and usually, these just require microwaving. Another quick breakfast option is to microwave one egg—for about 40 to 45 seconds — and serve it on a slice of whole-grain toast.

“A lot of times kids and parents are rushed in the morning, so we talk about getting some breakfast bars or high-protein bars that kids can eat on the way to school,” Froberg says. “Often children that aren't really hungry in the morning are willing to drink some milk, and you can add something to it, like an instant breakfast that comes in a packet.”

Another suggestion for kids who are not hungry in the morning and resist a well-balanced breakfast is a slice of whole-grain toast with some melted cheese on top (low-fat cheese if available). This can be made in less than five minutes by toasting the bread, and then adding the cheese on top of the bread in the microwave for 15 to 20 seconds. The consistency is like pizza, and you can tailor the taste to your child's favorite cheese.



Mahboubeh Sabbaghi with her children and their friend at breakfast.



Breakfast items prepared by Hyunsook Lee.

Sue Abney, a registered dietician at the Purdue University Student Wellness Office, concurs with Froberg that there are proven benefits for students to eat breakfast, but she says nearly one-third of elementary school students don't eat before they go to school.

She also advises parents to "pull together something that is nutritious and fast," such as whole-grain cereal and some fruit, or whole-grain toast, fruit, orange juice and a scrambled egg.

"I think whole fruit is always better because it has fiber, and some of that fiber never digests. It expands in the stomach and keeps people full longer," explains Abney. "You can also get good nutrients from a small glass of juice."

Meg Foley, mother of a seventh grader at West Lafayette Junior/Senior High School, has been giving her daughter a similar breakfast since her daughter was a preschooler.

"She doesn't eat all of it necessarily, but she eats much of it," says Foley about her daughter's breakfast. The meal is always the same, Foley says: an over-easy egg, veggie bacon, a slice of whole-grain toast, some berries and juice. Foley says her daughter relies on the routine of eating breakfast in the morning as much as the nutrition to get her through the day.

"It is partly the ritual of sitting down to have breakfast every morning," Foley says.

The breakfast that Foley and her daughter make does follow the recommendations of high protein content and high fiber. In fact, two of the items Foley gives her daughter for breakfast — eggs and berries — have proven medical benefits, according to health alerts posted online by Johns Hopkins Medicine (www.JohnsHopkinsHealthAlerts.com). According to a July 18, 2012, posting, "berries are high in a variety of vitamins, minerals, and fiber — and low in calories and fat." Kids like the taste of berries because they combine sweet and sour.

Eggs are listed as a fast and nutritious food by Johns Hopkins Medicine, and they are a source of protein. Foley's daughter likes her egg over easy, but the breakfast possibilities with eggs are endless.

Hyunsook Lee, a West Lafayette mom whose native country is Korea, makes her two children, who are 9 and 6, a steamed egg dish called Gaeran Jim. It can be made in the microwave or on the stovetop, says Lee. In the microwave, it takes four minutes to cook.

"Koreans enjoy eggs at any meal of the day, so this steamed egg recipe is an easy dish for morning, noon and night," Lee says.

Aurora Femat's, daughter—a Lafayette fifth grader — eats a boiled egg with some lemon juice sprinkled on it to

give the egg extra flavor and zing, Femat says. Femat's native country is Mexico, where she says lemon juice is often used on fruits and vegetables.

Consistent with what Froberg says about the benefits of milk, several of the moms interviewed for this story give their kids a tall glass of milk, flavored.

Mahboubeh Sabbaghi, a West Lafayette mom whose native country is Iran, makes a banana-milk drink for her two elementary school-aged children by combining two cut-up bananas, sugar and milk in a blender. Similar to a smoothie, this milk drink should get even the most reluctant breakfast eaters to enjoy a bit of breakfast. And Sabbaghi says it's fast.

"I wake up every morning at 7, and my breakfast is ready by 7:15," she says.

Femat uses a chocolate flavoring or vanilla extract used for baking in a large glass of milk with some brown sugar.

In addition to the milk drinks, Sabbaghi and Femat add other foods to breakfast, including eggs, cheese, toast or bread.

For many families, there is no time at home for breakfast, but that doesn't mean the student has to skip it entirely. At the Lafayette School Corp., students can purchase breakfast, even if they are not on the subsidized meal program, for a reasonable cost.

"We follow the USDA guidelines for breakfast, offering a variety of protein foods, grains, fruits or vegetables that will provide students with one-third of the recommended daily allowance of nutrients and calories," says Donna Scanlon, director of food services at the Lafayette School Corp. Parents should contact the individual school for more information on the logistics of getting breakfast at school.

West Lafayette Junior/Senior High School offers breakfast to all students whether on the breakfast program or not, says Jim Tyner, food service director for the West Lafayette Community School Corp. The Tippecanoe School Corp. also offers breakfast to all its students; check the corporation's website about nutrition and its relationship to learning. It includes a link titled "Go Breakfast!" (<http://www.schoolnutritionandfitness.com>).

Abney, whose job as a nutrition education coordinator is to advise students at Purdue about healthier eating, strongly advocates a good breakfast for the rigorous academics of college. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, putting some planning into meals can go a long way toward preventing weight gain. The CDC website offers numerous tips on healthy eating.

Of course, when considering academic performance there is no substitute for test preparation, but breakfast provides the nutrients to study, pay attention, and do the best job possible. ☘



Bread with Nutella and walnuts prepared by Aurora Femat.

Fast & easy protein

Start the day with good nutrition but also with something your children like to eat. Any recipe can be altered for taste and calorie content.

"One thing I really try to talk to kids about is portion sizes," says Linda Froberg, a pediatrician in Lafayette. "For example, a bowl of cereal. If you look at the package—it's usually a cup for the serving size—and yet many children will use a heaping bowl full of cereal, and that might be two or three helpings."

Basic Breakfast

(Meg Foley, West Lafayette mother)

- Egg, cooked over-easy
- Veggie bacon strips or veggie sausage
- Fruit (usually berries)
- Whole-grain toast (sometimes with jam)
- Glass of orange juice

Steamed Egg

(Hyunsook Lee, mother; native country: Korea)

- 4 eggs
- ¾ cup water
- 2 tsps. salt
- Chopped scallion, carrot, onion and squash



Steamed egg dish

Whisk eggs, water, salt, scallions and other veggies together until mixed well in a heat-safe, or microwave-safe bowl. If you are using the microwave, cover the bowl with a microwave-safe plate, and cook for 4 minutes. If you are using the stovetop, put the mixed ingredients in a steamer for 10 minutes over medium-high heat. If you don't have a steamer, you can put the heat-safe bowl in a large pot with a few inches of water at the bottom of the pot, and cook for 15 minutes over a medium-low heat.

Another Egg Option

(Aurora Femat, mother; native country: Mexico)

- 1 boiled egg (cut up, if desired)
- Lemon juice to sprinkle on egg
- Pinch of salt

Banana Milk

(Mahboubeh Sabbaghi, mother; native country: Iran)

- 1 glass of milk
- 2 T. sugar (or to taste)
- 3 bananas
- ¼ cup heavy cream (or to taste)

Put all of the ingredients in a blender, and mix for three minutes or until desired consistency.



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