An Investigation of the Breakfast Habits and Dietary Intakes of Year 8 Auckland Children

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Abstract

Breakfast is often referred to as the most important meal of the day. Studies have consistently shown that regular breakfast consumption makes a significant contribution to nutrient intake. Additionally, individuals who have skipped breakfast often do not make up for the missed nutrients during the remainder of the day. Results from the National Children's Nutrition Survey show that breakfast consumption varies with ethnicity and age. In particular, Pacific Island children and older children were less likely than other ethnic and age groups to have breakfast.

The overall aim of the current study was to collect detailed information on dietary intake, breakfast habits, choices, and preferences of intermediate school children. Two multi-cultural decile six intermediate schools in North Shore City, Auckland were selected to participate. A dietary assessment of over two hundred students (12-13 years of age) was completed using a dietary recall methodology. Data were also collected on breakfast habits and preferences, and anthropometric measurements made. A subset group of 52 students was randomly selected to provide detailed information on their nutrient intake. Each student within the subgroup completed two 24-hour recalls during the school week, and a food diary on a Saturday.

Findings from this research showed that both male and female students had a high level of breakfast consumption, with over half of the students reporting that this represented their daily habit. Overall, only 4% reported that they rarely or never have breakfast. The most reported reason given for skipping breakfast was not being hungry in the morning, followed by preferring to sleep in, and then lack of time. There was some evidence from this study that the daily commitments of family members (e.g., working parents) may influence breakfast eating habits. Additionally, it is likely that the availability of preferred breakfast foods at home contributed to high breakfast consumption observed in this study population.

Interestingly, breakfast consumption was not significantly associated with gender, but was however influenced by ethnicity, with Maori/Pacific Island children less likely to eat breakfast than children of other ethnic groups (P = 0.001). Breakfast skippers had a significantly higher body mass index (BMI) compared to breakfast eaters, although further research is required to assess the association between habitual breakfast consumption and BMI.

The majority of breakfast consumers chose foods and beverages that contributed to a balanced breakfast. Of those subjects who had breakfast, over 60% consumed a cereal, with the most popular being Weet-Bix. Findings from the subgroup analysis showed that the consumption of breakfast made a significant contribution to the daily intake of nutrients such as iron, calcium, folate, riboflavin, and thiamin, for both male and female breakfast eaters.

The information gained from this study may facilitate the implementation of nutrition education and intervention programmes designed to improve eating patterns (in particular breakfast consumption) and the dietary intake of children and adolescents. Promoting and maintaining good breakfast habits in children of this age group may lead to improved breakfast consumption patterns and health as they progress through adolescence.

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Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iv
List of Abbreviations xi

1 Introduction 1
1.1 Background 1
1.2 What is breakfast? 1
1.2.1 Breakfast: The most important meal of the day 3
1.3 Adolescent energy and nutrient needs 4
1.3.1 Macronutrients 5
1.3.2 Micronutrients 6
1.4 Food consumption patterns of adolescents 8
1.5 Breakfast consumption patterns 9
1.5.1 United States of America 9
1.5.2 United Kingdom 11
1.5.3 Europe 12
1.5.4 South Africa 14
1.5.5 Australia 15
1.5.6 New Zealand 16
1.6 The contribution of breakfast to nutrient intake 19
1.7 Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals 21
1.8 Childhood and adolescent overweight and obesity 26
1.9 Breakfast consumption and weight control 29
1.10 Effect of diet in childhood and adolescence on chronic disease in adulthood 30
1.11 Breakfast, cognition, and behaviour 31
1.11.1 Breakfast, cognition, and behaviour in well-nourished subjects 32
1.11.2 Breakfast, cognition, and behaviour in undernourished subjects 34
1.12 Barriers to breakfast consumption 35
1.13 Nutritional surveys of New Zealand children and adolescents 36
1.14 Breakfast intervention programmes 38
1.14.1 School breakfast programmes in the United States 38
1.14.2 School breakfast programmes in the United Kingdom 40
1.14.3 Breakfast programmes in New Zealand 42

2 Aims 44

3 Methodology 45
3.1 School and subject recruitment 45
3.2 Subjects 46
3.3 Ethical approval 46
3.4 Informed consent 46
3.5 Data collection Part A: Questionnaire and height and weight measurements 47
3.5.1 Questionnaire development 47
3.5.2 Pilot 48
3.5.3 Changes made to the questionnaire following the pilot 48
3.5.4 Administration of the questionnaire 48
3.5.5 Height and weight measurement protocol 49
3.5.6 Weight 49
3.5.7 Height 49

3.5.8 Protocol variation 50
3.6 Measurement of dietary intake 50
3.6.1 Dietary assessment 50
3.6.2 Dietary assessment methods 52
3.6.3 Weighed and estimated food records 54
3.6.4 24-hour dietary recall 54
3.6.5 Food frequency questionnaire 55
3.6.6 Diet history 55
3.6.7 Methods chosen and reasons why 55
3.7 Data collection Part B: 24-hour recalls and food records 55
3.7.1 Selection of subjects for Part B 55
3.7.2 24-hour recall protocol 56
3.7.3 Weekend food record 57
3.7.4 Menstrual status 57
3.8 Response rate 58
3.9 Data input and processing 58
3.10 Statistical analysis 58

4 Results 60
Part A - Questionnaire 60
4.1 Subject demographics 60
4.1.1 Gender and age 60
4.1.2 Ethnicity 60
4.1.3 Subject height, weight, and BMI 60
4.2 Breakfast consumption 61
4.2.1 Usual breakfast intake 62
4.2.2 Who makes breakfast? 63
4.2.3 Who did you eat breakfast with? 63
4.2.4 Why do you think it is important to eat breakfast? 64
4.2.5 Reasons for skipping breakfast 64
4.2.6 First meal of the day 65
4.2.7 Foods and beverages consumed at breakfast 65
4.3 Vitamin and mineral supplementation 67
4.4 Food Influences 68
4.5 Preferred breakfast foods and beverages 69
4.5.1 Preferred cereals for breakfast 69
4.5.2 Preferred milk for breakfast 69
4.5.3 Preferred breads for breakfast 70
4.5.4 Preferred bakery foods for breakfast 70
4.5.5 Preferred hot foods for breakfast 70
4.5.6 Preferred fruits for breakfast 70
4.5.7 Preferred drinks for breakfast 71
4.6 Meal patterns 72
4.6.1 Meal patterns from the preceding day 72
4.6.2 Usual meal patterns 72
4.7 School day 73
4.7.1 Travel to and from school 73
4.7.2 Arriving at school 74
4.8 Food and beverage purchases 75

Part B - Detailed Dietary Analysis 77
4.9 Subject demographics 77
4.9.1 Gender and age 77
4.9.2 Ethnicity 77
4.9.3 Subject height, weight and BMI 77

4.9.4 Menstrual status 78
4.10 Breakfast consumption 78
4.11 Reported nutrient intakes – Part B subgroup 81
4.11.1 Reported macronutrient intake 81
4.11.2 Contribution of macronutrients to total energy intake 82
4.11.3 Reported micronutrient intake 83
4.11.4 Weekday and weekend reported nutrient intake 85
4.12 Nutrient intake at breakfast meals 88
4.12.1 Contribution of macronutrients to energy intake at breakfast 89
4.12.2 Percentage contribution of breakfast 89
4.12.3 Weekday and weekend reported nutrient intake at breakfast 90
4.12.4 Breakfast eaters and non-breakfast eaters 92

5 Discussion 95
5.1 Selection of the participating schools 95
5.2 Breakfast consumption 96
5.2.1 Consumption patterns 96
5.2.2 Breakfast skippers 97
5.2.3 Foods and beverages consumed at breakfast 99
5.3 Vitamin and mineral supplementation 102
5.4 Dietary preferences and food influences 103
5.4.1 Preferred breakfast foods and beverages 104
5.5 School day 105
5.6 Nutrient intake 107
5.7 Weekday intake compared to weekend day intake 108
5.8 Nutrient intake at breakfast meals 109
5.9 Contribution of the breakfast meal to total daily intakes 111
5.10 Breakfast eaters and non-breakfast eaters 112
5.11 Limitations of the study 112

6 Conclusion 115
6.1 Recommendations 116

References 118

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of ethical approval 127
Appendix B: Information sheets 129
Appendix C: Consent forms 134
Appendix D: Letter to the school Principal 137
Appendix E: Letter to the Board of Trustees 140
Appendix F: Questionnaire 143
Appendix G: Weekday 24-hour recall record sheet 160
Appendix H: Weekend record sheet and instructions 163
Appendix I: Menstrual status assessment form 167
Appendix J: Food models and photograph book 169

List of Tables

Table 1.01 Percentage contribution of the breakfast meal to intake of selected nutrients of a nationally representative sample of New Zealand boys and girls 10-11 years and 13-15 years of age 16

Table 1.02 Summary of the percentage of children/adolescents consuming breakfast by age and country 18

Table 3.01 Number of students enrolled and the ethnic composition at both schools 45

Table 3.02 Advantages and disadvantages of different dietary assessment methods 53

Table 4.01 Ethnic composition of study population 60

Table 4.02 Anthropometric measurements of the total subject group stratified by gender 61

Table 4.03 Number of subjects who agreed with statements regarding the importance of consuming breakfast 64

Table 4.04 Reported subject meal patterns from the preceding day 72

Table 4.05 Ethnic composition of subgroup 77

Table 4.06 Anthropometric measurements of the subgroup 78

Table 4.07 Reported energy and macronutrient intakes of male and female subgroup subjects 82

Table 4.08 Percentage contribution of macronutrients to total energy intake stratified by gender 83

Table 4.09 Reported intake of selected micronutrients of male subjects 84

Table 4.10 Nutrient intakes between weekdays and weekend day 85

Table 4.11 Weekday and weekend reported intakes of male subjects 86

Table 4.12 Weekday and weekend reported intakes of female subjects 87

Table 4.13 Reported intakes of selected nutrients at breakfast of male and female subjects 88

Table 4.14 Percentage contribution of macronutrients to energy intake at breakfast for boys and girls 89

Table 4.15 Percentage contribution of the breakfast meal to total daily energy, macronutrient, and selected micronutrient intake for boys and girls 90

Table 4.16 Comparison of nutrient intakes from weekday and weekend breakfasts for male subjects 91

Table 4.17 Comparison of nutrient intakes from weekday and weekend breakfasts for female subjects 92

Table 4.18 Reported total daily intake of subjects who consumed breakfast versus subjects who did not consume breakfast (boys and girls combined) 93

Table 4.19 Reported total daily intake on no breakfast days, stratified by gender .. 94

Table 5.01 Nutrient composition* and cost per 100g** of the top four cereals consumed 100

List of Figures

Figure 4.01 Frequency of subjects' usual breakfast consumption by gender 62

Figure 4.02 Frequency of subjects' usual breakfast consumption by ethnicity 63

Figure 4.03 Reasons subjects skip breakfast in the mornings 65

Figure 4.04 Foods consumed at breakfast..... 66

Figure 4.05 Beverages consumed at breakfast..... 66

Figure 4.06 Brands of breakfast cereals consumed at breakfast..... 67

Figure 4.07 Reported types of vitamin and mineral supplements taken by subjects 68

Figure 4.08 Reported factors that influence food and beverages choice..... 69

Figure 4.09 Preferred fruits selected by subjects to have for breakfast..... 71

Figure 4.10 Preferred drinks selected by subjects to have for breakfast 71

Figure 4.11 Subjects' usual meal patterns during the week 73

Figure 4.12 Transport to and from school 74

Figure 4.13 Percentage of students feeling hungry in the morning when they arrive at school 75

Figure 4.14 Frequency of subjects bringing food from home or buying from the school canteen 75

Figure 4.15 Number of missed breakfasts per day stratified by gender..... 79

Figure 4.16 Percentage of subjects consuming foods and beverages at breakfast..... 80

Figure 4.17 Cereal consumption at breakfast, stratified by gender 80

Figure 4.18 Brands of breakfast cereals consumed at breakfast from combined 3-day dietary recall interviews..... 81

List of Abbreviations

BMI	Body Mass Index
CHO	Carbohydrate
CNS	Child Nutrition Survey
NZ	New Zealand
NZFCD	New Zealand Food Composition Database
NZNF	New Zealand Nutrition Foundation
MOH	Ministry of Health
MUFA	Monounsaturated Fatty Acids
PUFA	Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids
RDA	Recommended Dietary Allowances
RDI	Recommended Dietary Intakes
RTE	Ready-to-eat
SBP	School Breakfast Programme
SES	Socioeconomic status
SFA	Saturated Fatty Acids
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WHO	World Health Organization
WRAT	Wide Range Achievement Test