

News Release From:  
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### **Make the Connection between Nutrition and Learning**

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As students head back to school, it is important to recognize the connection between good nutrition and learning. Helping students to make healthy eating choices can set them up for success.

First look at what happens when students do not make healthy choices or are simply hungry. They are less physically active, less curious, less attentive and less independent. They tend to be more uneasy or nervous, more irritable or grouchy, not interested in learning, and unable to concentrate. How does this look in the classroom? There was a first grade boy in my nutrition class who just could not seem to stay awake during the class, even though his classmates were engaged in our lively discussions and fun activities. We talked about the importance of eating breakfast and some simple and quick ways to get fueled up for the day. Though not a morning person, he did commit to trying to eat a baggie of cereal on the way to school each morning. A week later he and his friends were anxious to tell me about the change that had come over him. The sparkle in his eye and his raised hand time and again during that class demonstrated the difference it had made for him.

Children and adults alike need food to fuel their bodies for action and for learning. Eating a good breakfast starts the day out well for better performance, improved concentration and a more positive attitude. A good breakfast should consist of healthy foods from three of the five food groups. Examples include whole grain cereal, fruit and low-fat milk; or eggs, whole grain toast and juice. But a great breakfast can be whatever works: low-fat yogurt with granola and fruit; a slice of leftover pizza or bowl of leftover spaghetti and meatballs with cheese. It could be as simple as a peanut butter whole wheat tortilla rollup with a glass of 100% juice or as unconventional as a slice of leftover meatloaf grilled on rye bread dipped in cottage cheese.

A bonus is that not only do students who make healthy food choices today feel better and have better chance of succeeding in school now, but they also tend to make better food choices as adults. These can help with performance at work as well as improving overall health.

For more information on making the connection between nutrition and learning, on ideas for healthy starts, or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition Specialist, at 660-425-6434 or [HackertJ@missouri.edu](mailto:HackertJ@missouri.edu) or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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