

# WHY SKIPPING BREAKFAST IS A BAD IDEA

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**BY JILL CASTLE MS, RD**

Roll out of bed and eat breakfast? Yeah, right. Many swimmers cringe at the idea of eating breakfast, especially if they're heading to the pool for an early morning practice or meet. But breakfast is a critical component of the training and competition diet. **Why breakfast is important** In a typical day, the swimmer eats several times, in intervals of about 3 to 5 hours. Overnight, the interval is longer because sleep cycles tend to be 6 hours or more (hopefully). The result is a long period of time without nutrition, and this semi-starvation state, if left uncorrected, can have a negative impact on physical and academic performance, as well as behavior. **All-important nutrients** Breakfast offers a host of nutrients the growing swimmer needs, not only for growth and development, but also for muscle repair (protein) and replenishing energy in muscles (carbohydrate). Other nutrients, like iron and calcium, help the swimmer avoid fatigue and build bones, respectively. When swimmers skip out on breakfast, their intakes of these nutrients are lower, and they may not get enough from meals and snacks later in the day. **Skipping may mean weight gain rather than weight loss** There is a belief that skipping breakfast will result in weight loss or weight control, especially among teens. But that's not what the research tells us. Skipping breakfast can result in too much hunger and overeating later in the day. Leaving out breakfast is also associated with poor food choices—high calorie, low nutrient foods that do little to satisfy hunger. Research has found that breakfast skippers are more likely to be overweight or obese compared to breakfast eaters. **Anything is better than nothing** Eating something in the morning is better than eating nothing at all. However, over time, the finer details do matter. Swimmers who choose donuts, sugary cereals and fatty foods may develop a strong taste preference for these foods and a nutrition habit that may be difficult to change. **Know yourself!** If solid food causes cramps or other discomfort before swimming, focus on a liquid breakfast: smoothies, an instant breakfast drink, milk or non-dairy substitute, kefir, a packaged yogurt drink, or 100% fruit juice. Liquid breakfasts will be digested faster than a solid breakfast. If solids are tolerated, but time is short, focus on small meals

that are quick to grab: hard-boiled eggs, trail mix, dry cereal, yogurt, a piece of fruit, a handful of nuts and raisins, or a muffin. If you have the time, and jumping in the pool happens later in the day, eat a well-balanced breakfast: cereal, milk and fruit; eggs, toast and 100% fruit juice; bagel, peanut butter and milk; or yogurt, granola, nuts and berries. Have you thought about the word breakfast? Break. Fast. Break the fast. C'mon, figure out what works and just do it. *Jill Castle, MS, RD is a registered dietitian and child nutrition expert. She is the co-author of the upcoming book, Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School (2013), and creator of Just The Right Byte, a child and family nutrition blog. She lives with her husband and four children (two swimmers!) in New Canaan, CT. Questions? Contact Jill at [Jill@JillCastle.com](mailto:Jill@JillCastle.com).*