



BUILDING BETTER breakfasts

Essential ingredients for a dynamic day

by jess sherman, med, rhn

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Tim was seven when his mother came to see me.

He was halfway through the first grade and his teachers were at their wits' end. He was always moving, always talking, and was struggling with reading and writing. They were concerned he might have ADHD. Tim had started hitting other kids and having epic meltdowns, usually shortly before the school bus arrived. His mother was worried that his behaviour might be a sign of a budding anxiety disorder—something she had struggled to manage in herself for years.

Tim is not alone. According to data compiled by the Canadian Mental Health Association, 1 in 5 Canadians struggle with a diagnosable condition related to mood and behaviour, and 70% of the time, these struggles started in childhood. ADHD-type behaviour is also on the rise.

Tim's mother was interested in better understanding the influence of food over her child's ability to learn, focus, relax, and socialize. In our first meeting I shared with her my four nutritional pillars that impact self-regulation. I also shared with her recent research about the impact of early nutrition on mental wellness later in life.

FOUR NUTRITIONAL PILLARS*

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| <p>1. Clean up:
Find and eliminate foods to which the body is responding poorly</p> <p>2. Nourish:
Increase nutrients to improve brain and body function</p> | <p>3. Stabilize Blood Sugar:
To create energy and hormone stability</p> <p>4. Improve digestion:
Improve nutrient absorption, reduce inflammation, & facilitate gut-brain connection</p> |
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*from *Raising Resilience* by Jess Sherman, MEd, RHN

When I asked what his morning routine was like she said, "It's a bit of a mess. We're rushed to get out the door and if I can get a few scoops of cereal into Tim in the morning I'm happy." She continued that while she knows that breakfast is important, "...he says he's not hungry and he won't sit down to eat, so what can I do?"

So that's where we started. The breakfast routine.

We planned out three simple breakfasts that contained nutrients needed for brain function and hormone stability. His parents could choose one to make ahead each evening so it would be ready in the morning and they wouldn't feel so rushed. His dad would sit at the table with Tim in the mornings for 10 minutes and eat with him before they all headed out the door.

THE SECRETS OF A GREAT BREAKFAST

1) Sitting in a calm environment helps trigger the parasympathetic arm of the nervous system and stimulate appetite.

Kids who are always in "go-go-go" mode are often not hungry for breakfast. The sympathetic, fight-or-flight arm of Tim's nervous system was turned on and when it's in that state, the body is not interested in food. His mom was right – breakfast is important – but we needed to trigger the parasympathetic arm of the nervous system to get his body in a state to be able to rest and digest and be receptive to food. To do that, the entire tone of the morning needed to shift.

At the start of this calmer morning routine, Tim was still restless and resisted his breakfast. But by day seven, he was more relaxed and was eating with his dad.

2) Eating a healthy breakfast helps break sugar addiction

Like many kids, Tim loves sugar, milk, bread, cereal, pasta, and little else. The trouble is, sugar (and the carbohydrates that quickly turn into sugar when digested) adds a great deal of stress to the body in

part by increasing inflammation and cortisol, worsening digestive health, and depleting critical nutrients needed for focus and learning. We needed to reduce Tim's stress and increase his nutritional status, and that meant reducing his sugar load.

Getting more calories and nutrients into Tim at the start of the day helped keep his blood sugar steadier, which reduced his need for quick sugar hits throughout the day. This translated into fewer carb cravings and allowed us to reduce his sugar intake over time.

3) A solid breakfast increases daily overall intake of protein, fibre, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals.

Nutrients influence every single function in the body, including those involved in learning, focus, stress management, and mood. A busy kid like Tim needs a steady flow of nutrients, since deficiencies in zinc, magnesium, B vitamins, and fatty acids have been shown to contribute to the symptoms he was experiencing. Once he was receptive to breakfast, it became another opportunity to load him full of the nutrients he needed for the day.

WHO'S UP FOR BREAKFAST?

As grownups, we understand the power of a good breakfast, and it's important to find alternatives to sugary cereals. This recipe is a breeze to make, is full of amazing brain- and body-boosting ingredients, and prepares little people for the big, busy tasks the day holds. As always, adapt for allergies you might be dealing with and work alongside your health care provider to ensure that your child is getting the right targeted supplements to fill the nutritional gaps, if necessary.

Make-Ahead Loaded Oven-Oatmeal

Ingredients:

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- 1 c water
- 1 c unsweetened fortified almond milk
- 1 c steel cut oats
- 1-2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 peeled and chopped apple
- 1/4 c pure maple syrup

Instructions:

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Preheat the oven to 375°F. Add water and milk to a large saucepan.* Heat until just bubbling, then add remaining ingredients. Stir to combine, pour into an oven-safe casserole dish with a lid, then cover and bake for about 30 minutes. Allow to cool, then refrigerate until ready to serve.

To re-heat, simply return to 350°F oven and warm, uncovered, for 25-30 minutes. Add a little liquid, if needed.

*If you have a dutch oven or other pot that is safe for both stovetop and oven, turn this oatmeal into a one pot meal!

Before serving, add one or more of these to each bowl:

- 1-2 Tbsp hemp seeds
- 1 Tbsp ground flax seed
- 1/2 serving of collagen powder
- 1 tsp ghee
- 1 tsp coconut cream or cultured butter

POWERHOUSE BREAKFAST BASICS

These simple staples are super-nourishing additions to many breakfast dishes, both sweet and savoury. Sneak 'em in or sprinkle 'em on!

Coconut Oil and Coconut Milk: a source of fat the body can use for energy; also has antifungal and immune-boosting properties. (Check out more about coconut milk in this issue!)

MCT Oil: a healthy fat that promotes focus and energy production.

Ghee: also called "clarified butter", ghee contains a healthy dose of butyrate, a fatty acid that nourishes the lining of the digestive tract and helps cells regenerate.

Flax Seed: contains fibre to support digestive health and blood sugar stability, and is a source of *alpha-linolenic acid*, an omega-3 fatty acid.

Eggs: rich in choline and sulphur, essential for proper brain and nerve function, detoxification, and hormonal signaling.

Pumpkin Seed Butter: a good source of zinc, a critical mineral for hormones, appetite and digestion, sleep, and so much more!

Purèed Pumpkin: a source of fibre that nourishes gut bacteria and helps keep blood sugar stable.

Steel Cut Oats: rich in fibre, nourishes gut bacteria, and is a low-glycemic carbohydrate that helps to provide sustained energy.

Cinnamon: has been shown to help stabilize blood sugar and is naturally antibacterial (and delicious!).

Cocoa Powder: a source of magnesium that helps nervous and immune system function as well as regulates blood sugar.

Apples: contain *pectin*, a fibre that promotes digestive health and blood sugar stability.

Profound behavioural changes can happen in kids when food and eating patterns are shifted, but they don't happen overnight! Start slowly with a consistent morning routine (for both you and your child!) and be ready to reap the rewards! •

For references visit: ecoparent.ca/food/better-breakfasts