

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY, 24 MARCH 2009

School Kids ‘Wagging’ Breakfast Are Missing Healthy Brain Fuel

The national MBF Healthwatch survey has revealed that a disturbing number of children ‘wag’ breakfast claiming there is ‘no time’ to eat, they are ‘too tired’ or ‘can’t be bothered’ having a meal before going to school.

The survey found that 22% of parents interviewed said their children skip breakfast on three to five school days of each week, and a further 20% skip breakfast on one or two school days.

The remaining 58% of parents said their school aged children always ate breakfast before school.

Bupa* Chief Medical Officer Dr Christine Bennett said, “It is disturbing to find that 42% of children are sent to school on one or more days on an empty stomach because it sends a clear message at an early age that breakfast isn’t important.

“Wagging breakfast is the healthy lifestyle equivalent of driving your car on an empty petrol tank – it inevitably runs out when you most need it.

“Research shows that skipping breakfast results in reduced learning, reduced attention and poor food choices for the rest of the day. Children who skip breakfast are more likely to be overweight which in the long term can lead to the development of chronic health issues.

“Children who miss out on breakfast are also less likely to get the recommended intake of dairy, fruit and vegetables,” she said.

Asked why their children missed out on breakfast before school, just over half (51.6%) of parents said there was no time because of the pressures of being late for school or work or because of sleeping in.

“Parents should encourage their children to eat breakfast. Storing a few simple ingredients in the cupboard or fridge or organising breakfast the night before can help in the morning rush. Healthy shakes and cereal bars are great for eating on the way to school. Toast, yoghurt and fruit are also quick, easy options,” Dr Bennett said.

Viewed nationally, the MBF Healthwatch survey showed that children missed breakfast at an average rate of 1.2 days a week – Tasmanian children were least likely to miss breakfast at 0.6 while Queensland and Western Australia had the worst record for breakfast ‘wagging’ at 1.4 and 1.5 days respectively.

“With many competing demands, we know that Australian families live in a ‘time poor’ society but the importance of making time for children to enjoy a healthy breakfast before going to school cannot be overstated,” Dr Bennett said. “It can be the start of a lifetime of healthy eating habits,” she said.

The MBF Healthwatch survey was conducted by research consultancy TNS Healthcare. For more information on the MBF Healthwatch Survey, please visit: www.mbf.com.au/wellness

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Table 1: Children 6 – 18 years missing out on breakfast on school days

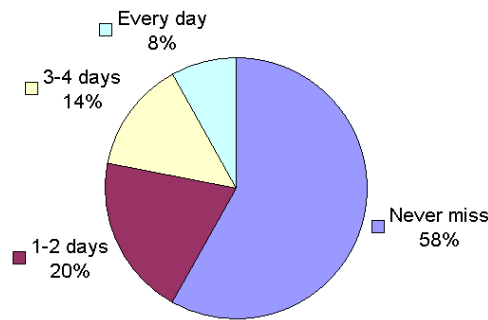


Table 2: Reasons for skipping breakfast:

Reason for skipping breakfast	6-12 year olds	13 - 18 year olds	All age groups
No time (running late for school or work) or sleep in	51.0%	53.8%	51.6%
Doesn't like eating breakfast	40.4%	40.7%	44.0%
Too tired to eat	9.6%	6.9%	5.9%
Can't be bothered	6.3%	5.5%	4.7%

Source: MBF Healthwatch survey, conducted by TNS Healthcare

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MBF proudly covers around 1.7 million Australians – giving them the confidence to better manage their health and care needs. We have a broad range of quality health insurance products to support people at all of life's different stages, and we have an extensive member centre network across the country. Recently, we were independently assessed by CANNEX and received a 'Best Value Extras Cover' award, as well as a five star rating as one of Australia's best value health insurers.

In addition to our core private health insurance business, the MBF group of companies offers life and travel insurance, as well as financial planning, superannuation and managed investment products through ClearView Financial Solutions, ClearView Life Nominees and MBF Life.