Elementary school students learn the benefits of eating breakfast

The Situation
Children receive many benefits from eating breakfast. Research has shown that eating breakfast can help improve math, reading, and standardized test scores. Breakfast helps children pay attention, perform problem-solving tasks, and improves memory. Additionally, children who eat breakfast are more likely to behave well in school and get along with their peers than those who do not. Children who eat breakfast are likely to have fewer absences and incidents of tardiness than those who do not. By eating breakfast, students get more of important nutrients, vitamins and minerals such as calcium, dietary fiber, folate, and protein.

However, most children don’t eat breakfast all the time, according to surveys conducted by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. They found that 42 percent of Caucasian and Hispanic children don’t eat breakfast all the time, and 59 percent of African American children don’t eat breakfast all the time.

Our Response
University of Idaho Extension Educators developed a program, “Be Your Best with Breakfast,” to teach elementary-age students the importance of breakfast and to motivate them to eat breakfast daily.

Children learned that breakfast means to break the 10-14 hour fast they have every night while they sleep. After reviewing the food groups, students were taught that a complete breakfast is made of foods from at least three different food groups. They learned about several complete breakfasts that could be prepared in less than five minutes. Younger students listened to The Hatseller and the Monkeys, a children’s book in which the main character learns the importance of eating breakfast. Older students evaluated a breakfast they had eaten recently and planned a complete breakfast. Each student received a full page set of magnets provided by the Idaho Dairy Council that contained motivational messages to promote daily breakfast consumption.

Over 3,100 students were taught in two Franklin County and eight Bingham County elementary schools and on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Students were from ethnically-diverse backgrounds. Nineteen percent of the students were Hispanic, 10 percent were American Indian, and almost one percent was Black.

Program Outcomes
Students in grades 3-5 completed a quiz before the class and immediately after the class. The number (N) of students answering varied from 999-1145 depending on the question. A McNemar’s Crosstabs test was
used to determine if pre-quiz and post-quiz scores were significantly different. Results are shown on the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% correct Pre-evaluation</th>
<th>% correct Post-evaluation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knew that breakfast is the most important meal of the day *</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knew that they should eat breakfast every day</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>1135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do/will eat breakfast every day**</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>1133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knew that breakfast should include foods from at least 3 food groups **</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>1135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were able to write a sample complete breakfast **</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

The Future
Healthy lifestyle education programs for youth will continue to be taught in elementary schools and in out-of-school settings. Other topics that will be taught include eating mindfully, choosing healthy snacks, using ChooseMyPlate as a resource for making food choices, and choosing grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Marnie Spencer, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Bingham County
583 W. Sexton
Blackfoot, ID 83221
Phone: 208.785.8060
Fax: 208.785.2511
E-mail: marniers@uidaho.edu

Laura Sant, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Franklin County
561 West Oneida
Preston, ID 83263-1293
Phone: 208.852.1097
Fax: 208.852.2812
E-mail: lsant@uidaho.edu