

AUSTRALIAN HEALTH SURVEY: BREAKFAST SKIPPING IN AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER 2016

In May 2016, a secondary analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the 2011-13 Australian Health Survey (AHS) was released, specifically looking at breakfast and breakfast cereals.¹

The secondary analysis, commissioned by the Australian Breakfast Cereal Manufacturers Forum (ABCMF) and conducted by Nutrition Research Australia, included details on breakfast consumption among Australians and the prevalence of breakfast skipping. This fact sheet outlines the data on breakfast skipping.

How many Australians skipped breakfast?

In total 11.5% of Australians did not report a breakfast eating occasion on the first day of the recall. Specifically, 12.3% of adults (aged 19 and over) and 8.6% of children (aged 2-18) skipped breakfast.

Did gender influence breakfast skipping?

Males (12.9%) were more likely than females (10.1%) to skip breakfast and due to the large sample size of the AHS data the association was statistically significant.

Across all age groups more males than females skipped breakfast, except for the primary school years (9-13 years), when more girls (10.1%) skipped breakfast than boys (6.9%).

Did age influence breakfast skipping?

From primary school aged children to those in secondary school, the incidence of breakfast skipping more than doubled - from 8.4% of 9-13 year olds to 18.9% of 14-18 year olds.

The number of breakfast skippers continued to rise into early adulthood with one in five (21.2%) 19-30 year olds reported not eating breakfast on the day of recall.¹ The trend reverted as people moved into their 30s, with just 12.3% of 30-51 year olds skipping breakfast (see table).

Australian Health Survey: proportion of people skipping breakfast

BREAKFAST SKIPPERS			
AGE GROUP (YEARS)	All persons	Males	Females
Total 2 years and over	11.5%	12.9%	10.1%
Children and adolescents 2-18	8.6%	8.9%	8.3%
Adults 19 and over	12.3%	14.1%	10.6%
2-3	1.2%	1.7%	0.6%
4-8	1.9%	2.0%	1.8%
9-13	8.4%	6.9%	10.1%
14-18	18.9%	21.8%	15.9%
19-30	21.2%	23.2%	19.2%
31-50	12.3%	14.3%	10.3%
51-70	8.7%	10.0%	7.4%
71 and over	3.1%	3.1%	3.0%

The impact of breakfast skipping on nutrition and health

The first meal of the day is important because it supplies the body and brain with glucose for energy and necessary nutrients after a night's sleep. Eating breakfast helps to stabilise blood glucose levels, regulate appetite and prevent overeating for the rest of the day.^{2,3}

People who skip breakfast have less nutritious diets with lower nutrient intakes, especially for dietary fibre, calcium and folate. The essential nutrients missed at breakfast are not made up over the rest of the day.^{1, 6-10}

Breakfast skipping is also associated with higher body weight.^{2,3} While the reasons for this are not well understood, it's thought that we burn more energy through physical activity when breakfast is eaten, compared to no breakfast.^{4,5} In Australia, adults who skipped breakfast were more likely to be obese and had a significantly higher waist circumference than those who ate breakfast.¹

The impact of breakfast skipping on academic achievement

There have been decades of research into breakfast skipping and its impact on specific measures of brain function, cognition and academic achievement.¹¹⁻¹³

Most recently, a systematic literature review of 41 studies, covering more than 166,000 school age children, identified breakfast eating as the most common dietary factor associated with better academic achievement.¹²

The benefits of eating breakfast are related to the nutritional quality of the breakfast and the finding that breakfast eaters have more nutritious diets overall.¹¹⁻¹³ An Australian study demonstrated that the nutritional quality of breakfast independently predicted numeracy and literacy scores even after adjusting for socioeconomic status.¹¹

Notes on the Australian Health Survey:

The ABS Australian Health Survey (AHS) is the most comprehensive analysis to date of Australian's health. It was designed to collect a range of information from Australians about health related issues including data on nutrition and physical activity. The 2011-2012 National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, was a component of the AHS and included a 24-hour recall of food, beverages, supplements and some dietary behaviours for more than 12,000 Australians aged two years and over. Approximately 9,500 private dwellings across Australia were surveyed.

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