

How we eat now

How to win the battle of the school-day breakfast



If you're short on time, it's tempting to give your kids sugary cereals. But there's a healthier way, says **Emma Freud**

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The time has come to tackle the thorny issue of school-day breakfasts. In our house, it's not a pretty affair: after my children have slept through the first four attempts to wake them, grumbled into their clothes, lost their shoes and taken quite a lot of time to not make their beds or tidy their rooms, there's usually only about eight minutes left for the eating part of the morning, until it's time for them to mislay their homework, get shouted at for forgetting to brush their teeth and be late leaving for school.

Of these eight breakfast minutes, about five are spent in a battle about what to eat. 'Scrambled eggs?' 'Not again – could I have Coco Pops?' 'No.' 'Why?' 'Same reason as yesterday – too much sugar. Toast and marmite?' 'Yes.' 'Hooray.' 'As long as it's nice sliced white bread, not that brown stuff you make.' 'Then no.' 'Frosties?' 'Nope, same reason as the Coco Pops.' 'OK, how about pancakes?' 'Well, that would have been a good idea, but there isn't time now.' And so it goes on. Daily.

It was not always thus in the UK. The whole breakfast cereal, bagel, muffin thing is one we've fairly recently adopted from the US. But somehow we've become the biggest consumers of packets of processed cereals in the world. Whereas the Mediterraneans get through 1kg per person per year, in the UK the average person eats 7kg of cereal per year. According to a former royal chef, even Her Actual Majesty The Queen likes flakes of corn or bran for breakfast. Clearly Prince Charles hasn't fully explained to her that most boxed cereals are puffed, flaked, flavoured, shaped, sugared and salted, stripping the grain of nutrients, which then have to be added back in using chemical versions so that the manufacturers can declare on the packet that technically it's good for you.

If you decide to take a hard line on sugary breakfast cereals, the problem is that preparing healthy food from scratch, which children will actually want to eat, takes time – and schools don't seem to recognise this when they insist on holding the morning assembly at 8.30am. Bircher muesli (soaked oats with fruit) needs to be made the night before, and who has ever remembered to do that? For pancakes, the ingredients need to be weighed properly with scales and ideally rested for 20 minutes before cooking. All the other really healthy dishes, like avocado on sourdough bread, or bran muffins, are impossible to get down the throat of any self-respecting child in 2018. Porridge is quick and nutritious, but my children refuse to eat it without an inch of sugar on top, which rather defeats the purpose.

In fact, they're so bored with me saying 'we need to eat less sugar,' that the youngest took to reading out the percentage of sugar per 100g from packets, in the full knowledge that I had no idea what qualifies as high or low. I've researched this now on behalf of us all, and can tell you that 5g sugar or less is low and anything over 22.5g is high. For additional ammo, 4g of sugar is one teaspoon, which helps to put it into context. This all means that, when he says 'But this one is healthy. Look – only 35g of sugar,' I can knowledgeably put it back on the shelf while shaking my head and tutting 'that's nine teaspoons' worth – no chance.' And don't be fooled by the portion sizes. The box of one leading brand labels 'a portion' as 45g. I asked my son to pour himself a normal-sized bowl of it, and he poured out 90g. That quantity has 18g of sugar – one teaspoon of sugar more than a Milky Way.

“Preparing food from scratch that kids actually want to eat takes time”

Sadly, there's no point turning to low-fat yogurt as a healthy alternative. Because it has less fat and is therefore less satisfying to eat, many companies use sugar to dial up the flavour. For example, a regular serving of one fat-free honey yogurt has around 32g of sugar in it – that's 2g more than a small packet of Wine Gums.

So, while the food industry works towards the UK Government's target of reducing overall sugar content by 20% by 2020, my mission this month has been to create a healthy breakfast that can be made from scratch in five minutes, and which a picky child will happily eat. First up, the instant smoothie, which contains carefully concealed oats for slow-release energy, as well as plenty of milk and fruit.

Job half-done in a thirty-second whizz. And then – my miracle solution – three-minute banana blender pancakes: five ingredients, no weighing, no processed sugar, easy to cook and gorgeous.

I tried them on my boys this morning, and the verdict was ecstatic (for teenagers at 7.30am). 'Yeah, OK, they're not bad. In fact they're quite good I suppose.' 'Guess how much processed sugar?' 'How much?' 'Literally none.' 'Oh great – so I definitely don't need to brush my teeth today.' As all parents know, you actually can't win.

4 Good Food contributing editor Emma Freud is a journalist and broadcaster, director of Red Nose Day and a co-presenter of Radio Four's *Loose Ends*.

HIGH-SPEED BREAKFAST

All the major food groups, minimal processed sugar, child-friendly, delicious, low on washing-up, no scales needed and ready in minutes. Feeds two hungry, fussy kids.

Two-minute breakfast smoothie

SERVES 2 PREP 2 mins
NO COOK EASY V

- 1 banana
- 1 tbsp porridge oats
- 80g soft fruit (whatever you have – strawberries, blueberries, and mango all work well)
- 150ml milk
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

- 1 Put all the ingredients in a blender and whizz for 1 min until smooth.
- 2 Pour the mixture into two glasses to serve then, without washing the blender, use it to make the banana pancakes (right).

GOOD TO KNOW low fat • 1 of 5-a-day
PER SERVING 156 kcals • fat 3g • saturates 2g • carbs 25g • sugars 19g • fibre 2g • protein 4g • salt 0.1g

Three-minute blender banana pancakes

SERVES 2 PREP 1 mins COOK 2 mins EASY V

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| small knob of butter, for frying | ½ tsp baking powder |
| 1 banana | chopped strawberries and banana, to serve (optional) |
| 1 egg | maple syrup, to serve (optional) |
| 1 heaped tbsp self-raising flour | |

- 1 Melt the butter in a non-stick frying pan over a low-medium heat. Meanwhile, add the banana, egg, flour and baking powder to a blender, and blend for 20 seconds.
- 2 Pour three little puddles straight from the blender into the frying pan. Cook for 1 min or until the tops start to bubble, then flip with a fork or a fish slice and cook for 20-30 seconds more. Repeat with the rest of the mixture to make three more pancakes.
- 3 Serve the pancakes with chopped strawberries or banana and a splash of maple syrup, if you like.

PER SERVING 153 kcals • fat 5g • saturates 2g • carbs 21g • sugars 9g • fibre 1g • protein 5g • salt 0.5g



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