April 2019 Newsletter

The school year is winding down, and with it, comes annual year-end testing. The CNS department wants to encourage all teachers, parents, and students to remember the vital role good nutrition plays in school success, and we have all the tools to make that happen!

**Breakfast Matters!**

We've all heard that saying, “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day”...and it's true! Many studies have shown that a good, nutritious breakfast is key to classroom performance, and has a direct impact on test scores and student behaviors. One of the most respected of these study groups is the Food Research & Action Center, who has been leading the charge to improve meal accessibility to all students, and has been tracking hunger vs. academic performance issues since 1978. Here are a few of FRAC's documented findings:

**Skipping breakfast and experiencing hunger impairs children’s ability to learn:**

- Children experiencing hunger have lower math scores and poorer grades\(^1,2\);
- Hungry children are more likely to be hyperactive, absent and tardy, and exhibit behavioral and attention problems more often than other children\(^3\);
- Children who are undernourished have poorer cognitive functioning when they miss breakfast\(^4\);
- Students who skip breakfast are less able to differentiate among visual images, show increased errors, and have slower memory recall\(^5\).

**Eating breakfast, including at school, helps improve student academic performance and behavior:**

- Children who eat breakfast at school (closer to test time) perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home\(^6\).
- Students who eat breakfast on the morning of a standardized test have significantly higher scores in spelling, reading and math than those who do not eat\(^7\).
- Providing breakfast at school improves their concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning\(^8,9,10\).

Free breakfast for all students is available at every school, every day. We encourage you to download the free [Web Menus](#) app (available for Apple and Android) to keep up with our daily menu choices. We also encourage all teachers and parents to “talk up” school cafeterias, and encourage all students to enjoy our healthy, delicious meal options.

The CNS Department believes that good nutrition is a vital part of the Muskogee Schools mission statement...EVERY HEART...EVERY MIND...EVERY DAY - THE MUSKOGEE WAY!!
**Technique of the Month**

Now that we're talking about breakfast, let's discuss some of the more nutrient-dense menu choices. Any breakfast is better than none, but the ones that feature a healthy protein such as eggs, lean meats, nut and seed butters, cheese, yogurt or beans along with whole grains and a fruit or vegetable will provide a long-term energy source to fuel those active bodies and minds!

One of the best, and least expensive, sources of protein is the egg. In spite of all the previous warnings about cholesterol, most recent studies show that consuming as many as 12 eggs per week has no real effect on cardiovascular risk levels, even among those with pre-diabetes or Type 2 diabetes. The mighty egg has 6 grams of protein and 13 essential vitamins and minerals, and provides about 70 calories while providing a higher level of satiety (that full and satisfied feeling) that prevents the mid-morning hunger crash.

Now that we know how nutritious eggs can be, let's explore how these powerhouses should be cooked to bring out their best flavor and texture. Egg proteins are very delicate and do not react well to high temperatures or overcooking. So keep this in mind:

1. **Keep the heat low!** It's tempting to crank the burner to high and scramble or fry an egg as quickly as possible, but that's the worst cooking method. Eggs only need to reach a temperature of 145° for sunny side up, or 155° to be perfectly scrambled, so start that pan out on medium low heat and keep it that way!
2. Eggs will continue to cook even after removal from heat sources. When scrambling or frying an egg, take it off the burner when it's just a little bit undercooked. Residual heat from the pan will continue firming up the proteins in the eggs, and you can prevent dried out or chewy eggs that way.
3. Don't boil a “hard-boiled” egg! Overcooking at a too-high temperature causes that unsightly green ring around the yolk, and creates the stinky sulphuric smell. Eggs that are too fresh are harder to peel, so hard-cooking is one of the best ways to use up some of those older eggs. Here's the preferred simmered egg method:
   a. Place eggs in a saucepan and cover with cold water to a depth of 1” above top of the eggs.
   b. Bring the water to a boil over high heat. Immediately remove the pan from burner, and place a tight-fitting lid over the pan. Leave untouched for 12 minutes for large, 9 minutes for medium, and 15 minutes for extra-large eggs.
   c. When timer goes off, immediately remove eggs to a container of ice water or drain and run cold water over for several minutes to hasten cooling. Peel by cracking on hard surface and rolling gently to loosen shells. Serve immediately, or refrigerate for storage. Hard-cooked eggs in the shell can safely be stored for a week, but peeled should be eaten by the following day.

**Recipes of the Month**

Since breakfast is the hot topic this month, here are a few family-friendly breakfast options that can be prepared in advance and get your family off to a great start.
**High Protein Bento Box**

This is similar to the expensive Egg & Cheese Protein Box from Starbucks.

- In a reclosable plastic container, place a peeled, quartered hard-cooked egg (recipe above), 1 slice of whole grain bread spread with 2 Tbsp of peanut, almond or sunflower butter, ½ apple, cut in wedges, ¼ cup grapes, and 1 oz. piece string cheese. **Nutrition facts**: Total calories - 498; Total fat - 25 grams; Total carbohydrates - 70 grams; Total protein - 23 grams.

**Overnight Oats**

Nutritionists rave about this healthy, filling breakfast that can be eaten on the go. All you need are a few ingredients, a jar or similar container, and a plastic spoon! Make sure to use Old-Fashioned rolled oats in this recipe, as the Quick-Cook variety will become very soggy.

My favorite container for these is a pint canning jar with a screw-top lid, but any container with a lid will work. Mix together in the jar, in no particular order:

- ½ cup regular rolled oats
- 1 tsp. ground flaxseed or chia seeds
- 1 Tbsp. honey, agave nectar or real maple syrup
- ¾ cup to 1 cup regular or non-dairy milk (almond, coconut, or soy milk)
- Fresh fruit of your choice (blueberries, chopped apples, dates, bananas, whatever’s in season)
- Any toppings you like – coconut, nuts, chocolate chips, granola, the sky’s the limit!

Once ingredients are mixed, cover with the lid and refrigerate at least 8 hours or overnight. For crunchy toppings like granola, add immediately before eating. These can be eaten cold from the refrigerator, or briefly microwaved to heat through.

**Nutrition facts for blueberry, honey, almond milk & granola overnight oats**: Total calories - 437; total fat - 10 grams; total carbohydrates - 178 grams; total protein - 15 grams.

**Freezer Bean and Cheese Burritos** - Serves 8

Yes, a bean burrito is a winner for breakfast. Beans and other legumes are great sources of protein, and a small sprinkling of cheese makes it better while limiting the fat and boosting the protein. Make these ahead of time, wrap well, freeze, and pop into the microwave right before leaving the house for a great way to get going in the morning!!

1 ½ cups chopped grape tomatoes or diced regular tomato, drained
4 green onions, chopped (optional)
½ cup drained pickled jalapenos
2 Tbsp. chopped cilantro (optional)
2 (15 oz.) cans low sodium pinto beans, drained & rinsed (save a little of the drained liquid)
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. Chili powder
2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
8 - 8” whole wheat tortillas, warmed in microwave
Place drained beans in a bowl and coarsely mash with fork or potato masher until nearly smooth; leave a few larger pieces of beans for texture. Add drained chopped tomatoes and green onions, jalapenos, cumin & chili powder, cilantro and cheese. Mix thoroughly, adding any reserved liquid from the beans if needed for a smooth consistency.

Spread about ½ cup of the mixture on the bottom third of the softened tortilla. Roll tightly, tucking in the ends as you roll, and wrap each securely in aluminum foil. Place in freezer until needed.

To heat: remove wrap and place burrito on a microwave-safe plate. Cover with a paper towel, and heat 1 ½ to 2 ½ minutes, until bean mixture is hot and cheese begins to melt. Be careful, as the filling will be very hot! Serve with your favorite salsa, if desired.

**Nutrition facts:** Total calories - 336; total fat - 12 grams; total carbs - 41 grams; total protein - 15 grams.

Now let's do a quick comparison to some pick-up breakfast options. Remember, these breakfast items are served in adult-sized portions, so there will be a higher calorie and protein count.

- **Option 1** - Egg McMuffin, hash brown patty, chocolate milk
  - Total calories - 730; total fat - 30 grams; total carbohydrates - 85; total protein - 29 grams
- **Option 2** - 1 Daylight glazed donut, 6 donut holes, 1 cup orange juice
  - Total calories - 635; total fat - 14 grams; total carbohydrates - 59 grams; total protein - 4 grams
- **Option 3** - Sonic sausage breakfast burrito, tater tots and ½ cup 1% milk
  - Total calories - 730; total fat - 68 grams; total carbohydrates - 31 grams; total protein - 35 grams

Muskogee's Child Nutrition Service provides many different breakfast items, from cereal to breakfast burritos, scrambled eggs & sausage to chicken & waffles. All are lower sodium, lower fat, and packed with whole grains. All entrees are served with choice of fruit, milk, juice and condiments to make a complete, delicious breakfast at no cost to any child, to fuel hungry students and get them off to the best possible start!

**Endnotes:**