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Media release

Bananas – brain food for back-to-school

Up to 33% of secondary students don't eat breakfast before school and don't refuel during the day

School children need energy throughout the day to stay alert, play and perform at their peak and the Australian banana industry is reminding parents to include a banana in lunch boxes to help their children through the school day as brain-food and an energy booster.

"Unfortunately, one in eight primary students and one in three secondary students do not eat breakfast before school, precisely when the brain needs refuelling," said Accredited Practising Dietitian Glenn Cardwell.

"To compound the problem, they don't refuel their energy stores during the day, particularly mid-morning and mid-afternoon when their reserves are depleted.

A third of primary students and three quarters of secondary students don't eat enough fruit each day, according to a government 2008 Child and Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey.

"Bananas are the natural healthy energy snack that all Australians regardless of age, should consider at breakfast time or to carry them through the day," he says.

Cardwell says, "If breakfast time is limited or a wholesome meal difficult to prepare for a student, a banana or a banana smoothie is a simple and nutrition-packed way to kick-start the day.

"Mid-morning or mid-afternoon, a banana can provide the fuel to recharge energy stores to make it to the next meal.

"But above all, a banana is one of the best snack foods available. Bananas are high in natural sugars and, despite the myths, are fat free. So while being the perfect energy boost, bananas do not ring obesity alarm bells," he says.

Research undertaken by Newspoll in 2008 found that a quarter of young people drink a soft drink for breakfast at least once a week or chocolate, ice cream, hot pies, hamburgers and potato chips in the morning menu.

Cardwell says, "As attention is increasingly being focused on obesity, a healthy start to the day is critical, as is the menu during the day.

"By missing breakfast, children are likely to consume more during the day meaning they are more prone to being obese and developing Type 2 diabetes and heart conditions later in life. Children who eat breakfast generally have a better memory, better mood, fewer flu and cold issues and eat less fat, all important for good schoolwork and better health.

"Bananas can therefore be somewhat of a lifesaver. Most people love bananas not just because of their flavour, but because they are so convenient to carry and eat and are completely satisfying when it comes to beating hunger with a highly nutritious fruit," Cardwell says.

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