**Andrew:**

Bel Smith is somebody we catch up with on a regular basis.

A lot of children in South Australia, well, the majority would've headed back to school last week in the far western New South Wales. The kids go back later this week. They get an extra week. Half their luck never happened when I was their age.

Belinda, good morning to you.

**Belinda:**

Good morning Andrew. How are you?

**Andrew:**

Good, thanks. You know, and I think at school, I remember in those summer months we used to go to school in the bush, no air conditioning. You'd open up your lunchbox at lunchtime and your mother's made tomato sandwiches and the tomato was just melted.

**Belinda:**

Soggy sandwiches. I remember them well as well.

**Andrew:**

Oh. Or we had fritz and sauce, Vegemite and cheese and the cheese had melted. It was a different era.

Now before kids head to school, is it probably more important, I suppose they have a pretty decent breakfast.

**Belinda:**

Well, look, yeah, I think breakfast is an important meal for sure. I mean, we go to bed at night, our body fast and starts to process everything that we've eaten in the last couple of hours before going to bed. And then when we wake, our glucose levels are kind of dipped down a little bit and we need something to break that fast, which is the why breakfast is called breakfast because we are breaking the fast.

But I think the important thing for us to remember as parents is that breakfast is, you know, really fuel for our children's brain to kickstart them for learning. Particularly as we head back into school or for those parents who have already got their kids back at school, that breakfast is that meal that gives them that little burst of energy for, for learning and behaving while they're at school and also socializing because the food we eat can impact the way that we interact with others.

And it needs to be of a quality that allows the children to go through until they have their first break for food at school. So it does have quite an important role to play.

**Andrew:**

Now, I'll, I'll go back and, you know, we're going back a few decades here. Breakfast for us, probably 99% of kids revolved around cereal and toast.

Has it changed a little?

**Belinda:**

Look, cereal and toast are still the most common breakfast around. But Andrew, I think the big difference for both you and I from when we grew up the kind of breakfast that we had was pretty much Weetbix or Vita Brits and Toastand Vegemite for, for breakfast. And then we would've had our sandwich, which my mom used to love packing Devon and tomato sauce sandwiches and a piece of fruit.

And then we would come home and we'd be lucky if we had afternoon tea. But then dinner was alway three veg and some kind of, you know, back then for mainly meat.

What children eat today is very different to when we were growing up and so a lot of breakfast cereals, for instance, today, I think Choice Magazine or Choice the advocacy group did a review of over 300 breakfast cereals a few years ago, and they actually found that 92% of them contained over a teaspoon of sugar.

So what that does is like sugar gives a spike in our glucose, which then releases insulin, and then our body kind of has to come back down from that. And that come back down, tends to be when we lose energy again and we need something else.

So depending upon the breakfast cereal that you're having at home, we might be putting our kids up onto a rollercoaster and they're up the top and then by the time they get down to school to learn, they kind of come down onto the bottom of the rollercoaster and that's when it can start to affect their ability to learn.

So that's the big difference I guess, from when you and I were growing up. The breakfast cereals are very different to what our children are eating today.

**Andrew:**

Do you think breakfast is the least planned meal of the day in households?

**Belinda:**

I really don't know about that. I don't believe I'm qualified enough to say what goes on in people's households. I certainly know that all different meals, depending upon the household can cause lots of struggles. But the challenges that face a lot of parents and caregivers in the morning are of course that these days most times the, the parent caregivers trying to get themselves ready for work at the same time as getting their kids ready for school at the same time as making lunchboxes at the same time as trying to get breakfast.

So there's a lot going on. It very much has become a meal where we are looking for something quick because we've got so much going on. The variety on the supermarket shelf, like you think 300 different varieties of breakfast cereal adds a lot of confusion to people.

So I think if we can go back to really keeping it simple, we could give our children a better opportunity for longer lasting energy while they're at school.

**Andrew:**

Now I've got a couple years on you Belinda, so I can guarantee you when I was there it was Weetbix or Corn Flakes and that was it.

**Belinda:**

Yeah. It wasn't too much more for mine. I think Vita Brits were thrown in back then.

But look, I think like the work when I'm supporting families is to try to recognize that everybody is where they're at and what can we do to support them to boost what I call boost nutrition.

So I like to think about what are the things that we can add in rather than restricting? So right now, if your household is a household that where your children love Cocoa Pops, for instance, just being truthful on its own, it's probably not a cereal that will give our children longer lasting energy. So rather than make life difficult for ourselves, what can we provide to add to that that would make it better?

And therefore you're not changing too much.

The kinds of things that you could do is add like a dollop of yogurt on top or before you have the cocoa pops, perhaps have something with a little bit more fibre in it. You might make your children a smoothie for instance, and they have the smoothie before they had the cocoa pops.

So what is it that we can do to boost nutrition as these other things that we're already doing, rather than let's turn the world upside down and make it difficult for ourselves. Does that make sense?

**Andrew:**

It does make sense. And it just shows how important that, that first meal of the day is that we do see a lot of schools actually have a breakfast club because there are children who arrive at school that have not had the opportunity to have breakfast.

And I think schools have realized that, well, if you don't give them something to eat first thing in the morning, their concentration levels, they'll be out the window.

**Bel:**

Yeah, that's 100% the background behind the, the Breakfast Club that schools have. There is a lot of scientific research and impact that's growing by the day at the moment. That really shows the impact of the quality of the food that we're eating has on the hippocampus, which is the part of the brain that's responsible for learning like memory.

And the better quality of the food, the better opportunity we are for being able to have great learning and great memory. So the schools have obviously cottoned onto that way before the science started to show it. They were there on the ground and recognizing that happening.

So the breakfast clubs do a wonderful job at supporting the families who perhaps for one reason or another aren't unable to get their children to have breakfast before they leave home. And that could be very many different reasons. So they are a fantastic community service.

When we partner with schools, because that's what The Root Cause does, we partner with schools and we help them make friends with food. We even look at their breakfast clubs and do the same kinds of things. Okay, what sort of things are you offering? How can we boost the nutrition of that so that the children get longer lasting energy so that they can sit in their chair and concentrate better.

So some of the things that I think that I would like to share with parents out there who might be thinking oh gosh, maybe I could make their learning a little bit better or their behaviour better, even for our own purposes. You know one of the first things I would say is if you're using cereal, don't beat yourself up about it. Like this is what's being marketed to us as a breakfast option.

So think of how can you boost the nutrition? So instead of having, if you're putting like cereal and then sugar and honey on top, rather than do that, why don't we add in some extra fruit like a banana for instance. It's, they've got the natural sweetness that's also got the fibre in it, which is really important at helping slow down the glucose spike that we get.

Or we could add some like nuts and seeds like sunflower seeds or if your children like cashews, things that have got good fats and proteins, because that again, helps slow down that spike of glucose that we get from a lot of the carbohydrate cereal breakfast that have sugar in them.

You could combine it with having a smoothie on the side, and I always recommend a piece of fruit and some vegetables in there. Like the vegetables are important for the additional kinds of fibre that they have packed in there.

You could add the yogurt you could even like, eggs are a fantastic addition. You could maybe if your children like boiled eggs, you could have like a boiled egg, um, to go along with your, with your cereal. The beautiful thing is a little bit of preparation on the weekend. You can boil up like half a dozen eggs and just have them in the fridge ready to pull out in the morning.

So it doesn't need to be something that you're doing in the morning. So they're all the things that we can say, okay, let's not change anything else. We'll keep the breakfast cereal going, but we can add something else to it to make it a little bit more nutritious.

**Andrew**:

You know, I'm sitting here listening to you this morning, Belinda Smith and I'm hungry now.

**Belinda:**

Yeah. And our brain's amazing like that. Mm-Hmm.

And you know what, that's exactly what happens with food manufacturing for instance. A lot of the packets are designed in a way to capture our attention. And then they've got the flavours that capture our attention, our children's taste buds. Which makes our job as parents so much more difficult. So here at The Root Cause our goal is really just to raise awareness and help people, I guess, over the longer term think of what's one thing that I could do to make it a little bit better than what I did yesterday without beating ourselves up about it. Because we're all learning and everything that we learn, we can just do better the next day. We don't have to beat ourselves up about it.

**Andrew:**

Well, I'm sitting here at the moment thinking I’m here for another, what, half an hour. I'm gonna go and get a feed. You've got me hungry.

Always good to talk. Belinda Smith. Thank you.

**Belinda:**

My pleasure. Take care everyone.