

How Doing This One Thing Every Morning Could Change Your Life

Breakfast at dawn—that's what my dad's barn cats enjoy each morning. Babycakes and Muffin come running for their kitty chow when he calls. (Yes, their names even sound like breakfast foods.) Dad wouldn't dream of letting his feline friends miss breakfast for even one day.

Yet across America, about 25 percent of adults make a habit of skipping the morning meal. That's too bad, because breakfast serves up a bounty of benefits that contribute to good health. When your mom said breakfast is the most important meal of the day, she wasn't kidding!

Studies show that eating a healthy breakfast:

1. Helps you maintain a healthy weight. Research consistently shows that breakfast eaters tend to be slimmer than breakfast skippers. Skipping breakfast has been linked to a higher prevalence of obesity. Eating a higher percentage of your daily calories at breakfast is linked with lower body mass index (a measure of obesity) and lower weight gain over time.

2. Revs your metabolism. As the name implies, the morning meal breaks the overnight fast. Your metabolism slows down during a fast to conserve energy. Skipping breakfast just extends the time your metabolism is in low gear. Eating soon after rising helps fuel your body and get it ready for burning calories throughout the day.

3. Improves mental performance and productivity. Regular breakfast consumption in children has been linked to improved academic performance and psychosocial functioning. Eating

breakfast may also improve cognitive function related to memory. It's just common sense that feeling hungry won't help you perform at your best – in the classroom or at work.

4. Ensures more adequate nutrient intake. It is hard to take in the recommended amounts of fiber, vitamins, and minerals in only two meals per day. It is especially difficult to get enough calcium without a source at breakfast. Studies show that children who skip breakfast don't compensate for the missed nutrients at other meals. And overall, breakfast eaters tend to make healthier food choices all day long, which adds up to more nutrients.

5. Sets a good example for your children and grandchildren. The role of the family in promoting good breakfast habits in children is well-established. Having parents who eat breakfast is one of the most significant factors that determine whether or not teenagers follow suit.

Why do People Skip Breakfast?

Breakfast skippers give reasons like "I don't have time," "I'm not hungry in the morning" or "I don't like breakfast foods." If time is an issue, try getting up ten minutes earlier or assemble your breakfast at night and put it in the fridge. For low appetite, start small—maybe a glass of 100 percent juice for a few days, then add a slice of toast. Try not to snack after supper the night before so you feel hungry by morning. If cereal isn't your thing, it's okay to enjoy nontraditional foods for breakfast.

What Makes a Good Breakfast?

Let's look at another "breakfast at dawn" to shed some light on this question. In John 21, the disciples had been fishing all night when the risen Jesus called to them from the shore where he was cooking over hot coals.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’” (John 21:12).

Can you just imagine the disciples gathering around the burning coals, relishing the savory smell of roasting fish? Jesus didn’t bring a dozen honey-glazed cakes. He took the time to cook a nutritious morning meal so His friends could energize their bodies for the day ahead. Jesus prepared a healthy breakfast of fish and bread—protein and carbs!

We can learn two things from this biblical breakfast. First, the disciples had the honor of starting their day with Jesus. While they refueled their bodies with food, their spirits were refreshed by being in His presence. We can start each day with the Lord, too, as we pray a blessing over our meal. What a joy to take it a step further and meditate on Scripture while we eat.

Second, Jesus fed the disciples lean protein and whole grains, two foods that satisfy hunger for hours. So when planning a balanced breakfast, try to include items from several of the food groups. The traditional cereal with milk and fruit makes a healthy combination. Or dish up an egg, yogurt, and 100% fruit juice.

Breakfast doesn’t *have* to be traditional, though. I enjoy half of a turkey sandwich on whole grain bread in the morning. My son prefers a baked potato with fruit and milk or dinner leftovers like pasta salad, chicken, or chili. Yes, chili.

To create an endless variety of healthy breakfasts, choose a food from three of these food groups each morning:

- fruit (100 percent juice, fresh fruit, dried fruit, canned fruit in its own juice)
- dairy (milk, yogurt, kefir, low-fat cheese)
- carbohydrates (whole grain bread or bagel, oatmeal, whole grain/high fiber cereal, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, baked or boiled potatoes, dried beans, high fiber

- muffin, whole grain waffles or pancakes)
- lean protein (eggs, chicken, turkey, lean beef)

For example, mix dried cranberries with brown rice and drink milk with it. Or reheat leftover spaghetti sprinkled with parmesan cheese and add a bunch of grapes. You're limited only by your own creativity and taste buds.

The bottom line on breakfast? Eat it every day. It's a wise choice for weight control and overall good health. Whether you rise at dawn to eat with the barn cats ... well, that's up to you.

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