

Breakfast:

Waking Up to a Healthy Start



Waking up is hard to do. It's especially difficult for those "non-morning" people who'd probably like to avoid that time of day and everything that comes with it - even breakfast.

But as sure as the sun's gonna shine, breakfast always will be an important meal of the day - one that should be consumed by people of any age.

Although all 3 traditional meals play a significant role in supplying the daily recommended levels of essential nutrients, nutritionists often cite breakfast as the day's most important meal and the foundation of healthy eating habits.

Despite these recommendations, millions of Americans routinely skip breakfast. According to a 1987 report in *Cereal Foods World*, one out of four women between the ages of 25 and 34 regularly skips breakfast. Other studies show that eating habits developed during childhood have the potential to last a lifetime. Thus children who tend to omit breakfast most likely will continue this dietary habit well into adulthood.

But a review of breakfast-related research over the last 30 years may make even the tried-and-true breakfast skipper into a breakfast convert.

Studies have shown that eating breakfast is associated with improved strength and endurance in the late morning, along with a better attitude toward school or work.

Breakfast helps to replenish blood glucose levels, which is important since the brain itself has no

reserves of glucose, its main energy source, and constantly must be replenished.

Studies show that sustained mental work requires large turnover of brain glucose and its metabolic components.

"When you consider it's been eight or nine hours since you've had a meal, it's obvious that refueling at breakfast will make you feel and perform better during the day," said Diane Odland, nutritionist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Human Nutrition Information Service.

Researchers at the University of Health Sciences /Chicago Medical School agree. They examined whether eating breakfast has any advantageous effects on late-morning mood, satiety or cognitive performance.

Forty normal-weight adults participated in the breakfast study, all of whom normally ate breakfast. Subjects fasted overnight and came to the laboratory in the early morning to perform baseline tests that measured reasoning, inference and problem-solving.

While one-third of subjects continued fasting, others ate one of two breakfasts that each contained 450-500 calories. In the high-fiber "balanced" breakfast, 59 percent of calories were supplied by carbohydrates and roughly 20 percent of calories were supplied by protein and fat each. In the low-fiber "unbalanced" breakfast, 61 percent of calories came from carbohydrates, 35 percent were supplied by fat and 4 percent were supplied by protein.

Study Results

Participants were tested for cognitive performance 30 minutes after mealtime, and then two hours and four hours later. Results confirmed that eating breakfast of either nutritional composition was

beneficial. Skipping breakfast consistently caused hunger and led to performance difficulties on tasks requiring concentration.

"Eating breakfast of any kind prevented many of the adverse effects of fasting," such as irritability and fatigue, according to principal investigator, Bonnie Spring, Ph.D. Spring added that those who ate the balanced breakfast scored significantly higher on tests than those who ate the unbalanced breakfast. In terms of suppressing hunger, the balanced breakfast also was most effective. The unbalanced breakfast suppressed hunger only relative to fasting; but four hours later, those who ate the unbalanced breakfast were as hungry as those who fasted.

School Breakfast Program

The potential role of breakfast in helping children perform at peak capacity in the classroom was first documented more than 30 years ago at the University of Iowa Medical College. Researchers found that children who skipped breakfast had trouble concentrating at school and became inattentive and restless by late morning. These behavior problems were linked to low blood sugar levels, which had never been replenished by a morning meal and allowed fatigue, irritability and restlessness to develop. Such behaviors are

counter-productive to learning.

These and other findings helped confirm the hypothesis that children who go to school hungry cannot perform well. To address this problem, Congress enacted the school breakfast program as part of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. Today, nearly 37,000 schools nationwide offer the breakfast program, reaching a total of 4 million children daily. The federal subsidy allows schools to make breakfasts that meet certain nutritional guidelines available to children on a reduced-cost basis, or free to those from low-income families.

In addition to improved cognitive functioning, breakfast has been shown to have other benefits. A 1987 study of third to sixth grade Massachusetts schoolchildren found that children participating in a school breakfast program had improved test scores as well as reduced rates of tardiness and absenteeism.

How does the breakfast impact adults? Much of the breakfast research on adults has focused on this meal's overall nutritional contribution to the daily diet.

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You Call That Health Food?

by Cassandra Forsythe, MS and Adam Campbell

Just because the label says it's good for you doesn't mean it is. Here's how to read beyond the marketing hype

Take a moment and consider this logic: 1. Fat-free foods are healthy. 2. Skittles are fat-free. 3. Therefore, Skittles are healthy. Make sense? Of course not. But it's exactly the type of reasoning that food manufacturers want you to use.

You see, in our example, we started with a false premise. That's because the term "fat-free" is often code for "high-sugar" -- an attribute that makes a product the opposite of healthy. Case in point: Johns Hopkins University researchers recently determined that high blood sugar is an independent risk factor for heart disease. So high-glycemic foods -- those such as sugars and starches that raise your blood sugar dramatically -- are inherently unhealthy. (See Skittles, above.)

Unfortunately, faulty food logic is far less obvious when you're shopping outside the candy aisle. Why? Because making healthy choices isn't as simple as knowing that beans are packed with fiber, or that fruits are loaded with disease-fighting antioxidants. After all, manufacturers often add ingredients, such as sugar, that can instantly turn a good snack bad. As a result, many of the products that you think are wholesome are anything but. And that's why we've created our list of the dirty dozen: 12 "healthy" foods that you can -- and should -- live without.

Yogurt with Fruit at the Bottom

The upside: Yogurt and fruit are two of the healthiest foods known to man.

The downside: Corn syrup is not. But that's exactly what's used to make these products supersweet. For example, a cup of Colombo blueberry yogurt contains 36 grams (g) of sugar, only about half of which is found naturally in the yogurt and fruit. The rest comes in the form of "added" sugar -- or what we prefer to call "unnecessary."

The healthy alternative: Opt for Dannon Light 'n Fit Carb & Sugar Control Yogurt, which has 90 percent less sugar than regular yogurt does.

Baked Beans

The upside: Beans are packed with fiber, which helps keep you full and slows the absorption of sugar into your bloodstream.

The downside: The baked kind are typically covered in a sauce made with brown and white sugars. And because the fiber is located inside the bean, it doesn't have a chance to interfere with the speed at which the sugary glaze is digested. Consider that 1 cup of baked beans contains 24 g sugar: That's about the same amount in 8 ounces of regular soda.

The healthy alternative: Red kidney beans, packed in water. You get the nutritional benefits of legumes, but without the extra sugar. They don't even need to be heated: Just open the can, rinse thoroughly, and serve. Try splashing some hot sauce on top for a spicy variation.

California Roll

The upside: The seaweed it's wrapped in contains essential nutrients, such as iodine, selenium, calcium, and omega-3 fats.

The downside: It's basically a Japanese sugar cube. That's because its two other major components are white rice and imitation crab, both of which are packed with fast-digesting carbohydrates and almost no protein.

The healthy alternative: Real sushi made with tuna or salmon. These varieties have fewer bad carbohydrates, while providing a hefty helping of high-quality protein. Better yet, skip the rice, too, by ordering sashimi.

Granola Bars

The upside: Granola is made with whole oats, a nutritious food that's high in fiber.

The downside: The oats are basically glued together with ingredients like high-fructose corn syrup, honey, and barley malt -- all of which quickly raise blood sugar.

The healthy alternative: Grab a low-sugar meal replacement bar that contains no more than 5 g net carbs -- those are the ones that affect blood sugar -- and at least 15 g protein. We like Myoplex Carb Sense.

Pasta Salad

The upside: Most pasta-salad recipes include a variety of fresh vegetables.

The downside: The main ingredient is white-flour pasta, a close relative of white bread.

The healthy alternative: Egg salad has no impact on blood sugar, and a University of Connecticut review reports that there is no connection between egg consumption and heart disease.

English Muffins

The upside: One English muffin -- two halves -- has half as many calories as two slices of bread. So it's better for a breakfast sandwich.

The downside: Most English muffins not only raise blood sugar significantly but are nearly devoid of fiber, protein, and vitamins. This makes them a great example of a food that provides only empty calories.

The healthy alternative: One hundred percent whole-wheat English muffins are a decent start, but we like the kind made from sprouted grains, which contain no flour and are packed with nutrients. For instance, Food for Life sprouted-grain English muffins have twice as much fiber and 30 percent more protein compared with the typical 100 percent whole-wheat version. (For stores, check foodforlife.com.)

Croutons

The upside: They're so small they contribute very few calories to your overall meal, yet they add a satisfying crunch.

The downside: Most croutons are made with the same refined flour that's used in white bread, a food with a higher glycemic index than sugar.

The healthy alternative: Sliced roasted almonds. They're crunchy, sugar-free, and high in monounsaturated fats, the same type of healthy fats found in olive oil. In fact, Harvard University researchers estimate that substituting nuts for an equivalent amount of carbohydrates results in a 30 percent reduction in heart-disease risk.

Fat-Free Salad Dressing

The upside: Cutting out the fat reduces the calories that a dressing contains.

The downside: Sugar is added to provide flavor. But perhaps more important is that the removal of fat reduces your body's ability to absorb many of the vitamins found in a salad's vegetables. Ohio State University researchers discovered that people who ate a salad dressing that contained fat absorbed 15 times more beta-carotene and five times more lutein -- both powerful antioxidants -- than when they downed a salad topped with fat-free dressing.

The healthy alternative: Choose a full-fat dressing that's made with either olive oil or canola oil and has less than 2 g carbs per serving.

Fruit Cocktail

The upside: The main ingredient is fruit.

The downside: If you don't read the label closely, you may choose a brand that's packed in heavy syrup. For instance, a 1/2-cup serving of syrupy fruit cocktail contains 23 g added sugar.

The healthy alternative: Look for fruit cocktail canned in "100 percent juice," not syrup.

Reduced-Fat Peanut Butter

The upside: Even the reduced-fat versions pack a substantial quantity of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat.

The downside: Many commercial brands are sweetened with "icing sugar" -- the same finely ground sugar used to decorate cupcakes. In fact, each tablespoon of Skippy contains half a teaspoon of the sweet stuff. Reduced-fat versions are the worst of all, because they contain less healthy fat and even more icing sugar.

The healthy alternative: An all-natural, full-fat peanut butter -- such as Crazy Richard's or Teddy's -- that contains no added sugar.

Pretzels

The upside: One ounce has just 110 calories.

The downside: These twisted low-fat snacks have one of the highest glycemic indexes of any food. In fact, they rank above ice cream and jelly beans in their ability to raise blood sugar.

The healthy alternative: Cheese crisps -- baked pieces of cheese that crunch like chips.

Corn Oil

The upside: It contains omega-6 fatty acids -- unsaturated fats that don't raise cholesterol.

The downside: Corn oil has 60 times more omega-6s than omega-3s, the type of healthy fats found in fish, walnuts, and flaxseed. Studies suggest that a high intake of omega-6 fats relative to omega-3 fats increases inflammation, which boosts your risk of cancer, arthritis, and obesity.

The healthy alternative: Olive or canola oils, which have a far better ratio of omega-6s to omega-3s.