

## The Benefits of Breakfast

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You've heard it before: "*Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.*" Every wonder why? Breakfast is important for refueling your body after a night's sleep. The eight or more hour time span between dinner and breakfast is the longest span between any of three meals of the day. While you are sleeping, the body needs fuel to keep your heart beating, nerves transmitting, and cells dividing, just to name a few. Much of that fuel comes from the readily available stores of glucose in the blood, liver and muscles. By sunrise, the body is essentially in a fasting mode. That first meal of the day literally breaks the fast. That's why breakfast is so important, especially if you exercise in the morning.

If you skip breakfast, blood sugar levels drop, fatigue, poor concentration, irritability and lethargy results. During intense or long duration exercise, your muscles need the fast-burning energy that comes from carbohydrates. Without it, your performance will suffer because of low blood sugars and depleted energy stores. A quick high-carbohydrate breakfast that includes a low-fat protein source may be all it takes to boost your morning workouts and keep your energy levels high throughout the day.

Some good breakfast choices include:

- Whole-grain cereal, a banana and skim milk
- Egg substitute, whole-wheat toast and ½ a grapefruit
- A whole-wheat toaster waffle topped with fat-free sour cream and fresh blueberries
- A four tortilla or pita pocket filled with cottage cheese and fresh fruit.
- A low-fat, whole-wheat bran muffin topped with applesauce and yogurt
- An English muffin topped with an ounce of low-fat melted cheese and a glass of orange juice
- A cinnamon-raisin bagel topped with peanut butter and banana slices

Other good reasons to eat breakfast:

- By eating a nutritious breakfast, one that includes at least one serving of fruit, you have better chances of reaching the recommended five. By eating a nutritious breakfast, one that includes at least one serving of fruit, you have better chances of reaching the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. Dozens of studies have shown that people who eat plenty of fruit and vegetables have a lower risk of heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases.
- Start your day with a bowl of breakfast cereal, and you're more likely to get all the nutrients you need. That's because most cereals these days are fortified with many of the important vitamins and minerals your body needs to stay healthy.
- The best breakfast cereals are rich in fiber, something most of us don't get enough of. Experts say we need 25 to 30 grams of fiber a day to be our healthiest. In a study publishing in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in September, 1999, Harvard University scientists found that women who as 23 grams of fiber a day, mostly from cereal, were 23% less likely to have heart attacks than those who consumed only 11 grams.
- If you're trying to drop a few pounds, sitting down to a healthy, high-fiber breakfast could be the key to success. One reason may be that high-fiber foods fill you upon fewer calories. Fiber also slows the digestive process, which in turn wards off hunger pangs later. That's especially important in the morning.

Finally, the key to a healthy start to your day is to follow these simple rules: If you're a seasoned breakfast skipper, consider changing your ways and start eating breakfast, even if you aren't hungry. It takes two to three weeks to reset the appetitive clock. After that, you should notice a boost in energy and fewer problems with overeating later in the day. Make sure breakfast includes at least one, preferably, two, servings of fruit. Lastly, make sure your breakfast includes high-fiber foods like toasted whole grain bread, high-fiber cereal, or oatmeal. That's all you need to be well on your way to a daily helping of energy and good health!