

The Most Important Meal of the Day by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Remember the saying, “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day?” It’s true. In fact, breakfast may help control Americans’ increasing problem with overweight and obesity. A number of studies show that people who successfully maintain a significant weight loss eat breakfast just about every day.

What you choose to eat for breakfast makes a big difference for your health. A variety of fruits can bring you near the minimum number of five daily fruit and vegetable servings recommended for lower cancer risk. Or once in a while, try a medley of vegetables in an omelet.

A Long-Lasting Start to Your Day

After fasting all night, breakfast can kick-start your energy level. If you choose healthful, slow-burning foods, like whole grains and fruits, you should be able to control your appetite until midday. Overeating throughout the day is also less likely. Studies show that people who skip breakfast tend to make up for the calories later in the day, often with unhealthy, high-fat and high-calorie convenience foods.

There’s another advantage, too. Eating breakfast increases the metabolic – or calorie-burning rate. Consequently, you have more energy and weight control is easier.

Watch out for foods heavy with refined sugars, like pastries and sugary cereals. These foods offer calories without many essential nutrients. High sugar foods and drinks may also cause your energy to soar briefly before it falls to lower levels. You may feel more drained and hungry, even if you ate breakfast.

To avoid the sugar slump, choose whole grain breads and cereals (with low sugar content), fresh or canned fruits (in unsweetened juice) and even foods that are not usually served for breakfast, such as vegetable soup or a bean spread like hummus on whole wheat toast. Choosing these foods will give you longer-lasting energy.

Breakfast on the Go

To resist the temptation to grab a doughnut, shop smart. Stock your pantry with healthful ingredients, like oatmeal, whole wheat bread, wheat germ, nuts and canned or dried fruit. Flaxseed from health food stores is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, which you can grind and add to low fat cereal, yogurt, cottage cheese and smoothies. Some other quick and healthful ideas are:

- A nonfat or low fat yogurt parfait layered with fresh fruit and cereal, nuts or raisins
- Low fat yogurt mixed with fresh fruit in a blender for a vitamin-rich smoothie
- Whole wheat toast with a little peanut butter and banana slices
- Instant or quick-cooking oatmeal or whole grain cold cereal with raisins or fresh fruit and low fat dairy or soy milk
- Fish, such as leftover salmon, on a whole grain bagel with reduced or nonfat cream cheese
- Homemade bran or fruit and nut muffins, made on the weekend and frozen

*The American Institute for Cancer Research offers a brochure called **The New American Plate for Breakfast** to help you change to a better beginning each day. It includes recipes. Call (800) 843-8114, ext. 110 to request your free copy.*