

## Lose Weight: Eat Breakfast

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What's for breakfast - coffee? Most mornings, we barely glance at the kitchen. Fixing breakfast takes up precious time that's in short supply. **But there's ample evidence that the simple act of eating breakfast -- every day -- is a big part of losing weight, lots of weight.**

"People skip breakfast thinking they're cutting calories, but by mid-morning and lunch, that person is starved," says Milton Stokes, RD, MPH, chief dietitian for St. Barnabas Hospital in New York City. **"Breakfast skippers replace calories during the day with mindless nibbling, bingeing at lunch and dinner. They set themselves up for failure."**



### The Benefits of Breakfast

**Eating breakfast is a daily habit for the "successful losers" who belong to The National Weight Control Registry.** These people have maintained a 30-pound (or more) weight loss for at least a year, and some as long as six years.

"Most -- 78% -- reported eating breakfast every day, and almost 90% reported eating breakfast at least five days a week - which suggests that starting the day with breakfast is an important strategy to lose weight and keep it off," says James O. Hill, PhD, the Registry's co-founder and director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

Two studies in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association backed up this finding. Though they were funded by cereal companies, dietitians say they underscore the message - breakfast is important to weight loss.

A group of researchers analyzed data from a government-funded study that followed more than 2,000 young girls from ages 9 to 19. They found that regular cereal eaters



had fewer weight problems than infrequent cereal eaters. Those who ate cereal occasionally had a 13% higher risk of being overweight compared to the regular cereal eaters.

Another research group analyzed government data on 4,200 adults. They found that regular breakfast eaters were more likely to exercise regularly. And women who ate breakfast regularly tended to eat fewer calories overall during the day. Those men and women who ate breakfast cereal had lower overall fat intake -- compared to those who ate other breakfast foods.

It makes sense: Eating early in the day keeps us from "starvation eating" later on. But it also jump-starts your metabolism, says Elisabetta Politi, RD, MPH, nutrition manager for the Duke Diet & Fitness Center at Duke University Medical School. **"When you don't eat breakfast, you're actually fasting for 15 to 20 hours, so you're not producing the enzymes needed to metabolize fat to lose weight."**

Among the people she counsels, breakfast eaters are usually those who have lost a significant amount of weight. They also exercise. "They say that before having breakfast regularly, they would eat most of their calories after 5 p.m.," Politi tells WebMD. **"Now, they try to distribute calories throughout the day. It makes sense that the body wants to be fueled."**

### The Smart Breakfast

If breakfast is the most important meal of the day, it's best to make wise food choices. That's where fruits, vegetables, and whole grains come into the picture. Because these are high-fiber foods, they fill you up - yet they bring less fat to the table, says Barbara J. Rolls, PhD, the Guthrie Chair in Nutrition at Pennsylvania State University in Pittsburgh and author of The Volumetrics Weight Control Plan.

These high-fiber foods allow you to eat more food yet get fewer calories. It's a concept called "energy density" - the number of calories in a specified amount of food, Rolls explains.

"Some foods - especially fats - are very energy dense, which means they have a lot of calories packed into a small size," Rolls tells WebMD. "However, foods that contain lots of water have very low energy density. Water itself has an energy density of zero. High-fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, and grains have low energy density."

**Translation: If you eat foods with high energy density, such as bagels, you rack up calories quickly. If you eat high-fiber, low-energy-density foods - such as oatmeal, strawberries, walnuts, and low-fat yogurt -- you can eat more and get fewer calories.**



A breakfast made up of 1 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of low-fat milk, 1 cup of sliced strawberries, and 1 tablespoon of walnuts has only 307 calories total. Two multi-grain waffles, with 1 cup of blueberries, 3 tablespoons of light syrup, and 1 cup of plain low-fat yogurt have about 450 calories total. That's almost equal to the standard bagel-and-cream-cheese breakfast - yet it's much more food, and much lower in fat.



### **Breakfast Fast and Easy**

**A high-fiber cereal - 3 to 5 grams of fiber per serving -- is optimal**, Stokes advises. "But don't overdo it if you're not used to it, because too much fiber can cause constipation, diarrhea, or an upset stomach."

As for sugary cereals, "it's better than nothing," he says. "Some breakfast is better than no breakfast. The last thing anyone should do is skip breakfast. Otherwise, you'll be eating something even worse later on - candy bars and potato chips -- because you're starving."

An even better option: "Some moms take sweetened cereal and mix it with unsweetened cereal. Or they take unsweetened cereal and mix it with something a little sugary -- yogurt or low-fat pudding."

### **Smart Breakfast Made Simple**

"Breakfast doesn't need to be elaborate," Stokes tells WebMD. "My philosophy is, the simpler the better." **He keeps frozen blueberries or peaches on hand. "They're even more nutritious than fresh anyway because they are picked at peak time, and frozen immediately." Canned peaches (in natural juices, no sugar added) are also a good option.**

Peanut butter, eggs, low-fat yogurt/milk are other good choices, he says.

His quick breakfast suggestions:

- Banana with peanut butter
- Banana sliced into yogurt
- Oatmeal with fruit -- like apples, blueberries, or peaches
- Small tortilla with a few tablespoons of peanut butter and chopped strawberries. Roll it up, slice it. It works for kids and adults.
- Breakfast smoothies -- berries, ice, and milk or yogurt. "They're portable -- throw some in a cup, and you're out the door," he notes.

**As for the much-beloved bagel - sadly, it's the calorie equivalent of five slices of bread, says Stokes. "Just eat half. Better yet, don't bring them into your home. You'll just end up eating the whole thing so it won't go bad."**

Best option: "Go for the smaller bagels, the little ones that are like hockey pucks. **Spread some almond or cashew butter on it instead of cream cheese.** People think cream cheese is a dairy food, but it's not -- it's fat. If you must have cream cheese, buy low-fat. Honestly there is no difference in taste. Add a little bit of jam, some sliced strawberries."



If on-the-run fast food breakfast sandwiches are your downfall, here's how to indulge in a healthy way: whole-grain English muffins, a cooked egg, low-fat cheese melted on top - ham or Canadian bacon optional. "It's portable. You can drive with that," Stokes says. "Sometimes for dinner, I'll have two of those if I don't feel like cooking."

If you love granola, read labels carefully, he advises. "Buy low-fat, and treat it as a condiment, not the main dish. If you treat it like the main, you'll eat too much fat and sugar."

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