

CNN International

cnn.com October 2007 (Original Reprint Cooking Light)

Healthful breakfast tips to keep you fueled all day

- Story Highlights
- A good breakfast will help you make better food choices throughout the day
- Sit to eat -- even for five minutes -- and try to focus only on enjoying your meal
- Pair lean protein with fiber-rich carbohydrates -- whole-grain breads, cereals

By Nicci Micco

More than any other meal, breakfast is an investment in good health. Eating in the morning helps you stay focused and energized through busy days. Breakfast increases the likelihood of meeting recommended daily doses for essential vitamins and minerals that help prevent disease. And recent research makes the idea of a morning meal even more appetizing. A study in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that individuals who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight -- and more likely to exercise -- than non-breakfast eaters.

"Starting the day with a healthy meal may help keep your appetite in check, resulting in healthier food choices overall," says Suzanne Phelan, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown Medical School and co-investigator for the National Weight Control Registry, which tracks the eating and exercise habits of "successful losers." "Nutrients consumed at breakfast also may lead to a better ability to perform physical activity later in the day," says Phelan.

Preparing a healthful breakfast is easier than you might think, no matter how busy your schedule. Just aim to incorporate the following five elements of better breakfasts into your morning meal. [CookingLight.com: Try these tactics to fit good nutrition and exercise into your busy schedule](#)

Eat mindfully

Sit to eat -- even for five minutes -- and try to focus only on enjoying your meal, savoring the flavors and aromas. **"If you're eating while rushing around -- getting yourself or your kids ready for the day -- you won't really feel like you've had a meal,"** says **Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D.**, adjunct assistant professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of **"The Portion Teller."** When you get to the office and see doughnuts, you'll feel like you've already eaten. No time for breakfast at home? Toss a portable meal into your tote to eat at your desk before you begin answering e-mails or returning phone calls.

The goal is to start the day with a relaxing meal. "You don't have to sit and meditate at breakfast," says Beth Casey Gold, R.D., clinical coordinator for the Behavioral Weight Management Program at the University of Vermont in Burlington. "It's OK if you read the newspaper or spend a few minutes watching TV if that's an enjoyable part of your morning ritual," she says. "Just keep the experience pleasant."

Include lean protein

A scone or bagel may be tempting, but if you eat only refined carbohydrates, you'll likely be hungry again in two hours, Gold says. Include protein in your morning meal: It is digested at a slower rate than carbohydrates, which keeps blood sugar levels steady -- and helps you feel satisfied longer. Good choices include skim milk (on cereal or in a latte or cappuccino), low-fat yogurt, soy or turkey sausage, low-fat cheese, or eggs (hard-boiled, poached, or scrambled in nonfat spray). Eggs may be a particularly smart choice if weight control is important. A recent study in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition reported that those who ate eggs for breakfast consumed fewer calories at lunch and over the next 24 hours than those who had a refined bagel containing the same number of calories. The researchers attributed eggs' superior satiety value to their protein content.

[CookingLight.com: Soy -- the lean, green protein](#)

Fill up with fiber

For guaranteed breakfast satisfaction, pair lean protein with a serving of fiber-rich carbohydrates. Go for whole-grain breads and cereals that provide at least four grams of fiber per serving. To boost fiber intake further, supplement your morning meal with a serving of fruit. When it comes to feeling full, whole fruit has an edge over juice: It not only takes longer to digest, due to the fiber (unless they're fortified, few juices contain fiber), but it also takes longer to eat, which offers psychological satisfaction, Young says.

Insoluble fiber from whole grains is largely indigestible and takes up space in the stomach, helping you feel full. Soluble fiber --also found in grains and fruit--helps lower cholesterol. These quality carbohydrates provide a long-lasting source of energy, so you continue to feel fueled several hours after eating. According to research published in the International Journal of Food Science and Nutrition, the energy supplied by a breakfast high in fiber-rich carbohydrates versus one that is high-fat may result in better mental focus during morning hours. [CookingLight.com: What's your food IQ?](#)

Front-load your day with nutrients

Breakfast offers an excellent opportunity to increase your daily vitamin and mineral intake. A recent study in the Journal of the [American Dietetic Association](#) reported that people who ate breakfast had higher overall intakes of vitamin B6, folic acid, vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, and fiber than people who skipped their morning meal. Those nutrients help protect against a variety of diseases, ranging from heart disease to osteoporosis.

Consider this: An orange, a cup of skim milk (or 12-ounce skim latte), and a whole wheat English muffin spread with a tablespoon of peanut butter, supplies 42 percent of the Daily Value (DV) for heart-healthy fiber, 49 percent DV of bone-building calcium, and 163 percent DV of immune-boosting vitamin C.

If a busy schedule might interfere with your good-eating intentions, keep a variety of whole foods on hand, including fruits, vegetables (for omelets), nuts or nut butters, whole grains (bread products, cereals, oatmeal, etc.), and calcium-rich low-fat dairy products. That way, you'll always have the ingredients for a nutritious breakfast.

Savor your favorite tastes

"If you don't like what you're eating, you won't stick with it," Phelan says. If your choices aren't the most nutritious, small tweaks can make them more healthful. For example, if you have a sweet tooth in the morning, try a piece of nutty whole-grain bread spread with a tablespoon each of almond butter (it's slightly sweeter than peanut butter) and fruit preserves instead of eating foods that offer sweetness but little nutritional benefit, like doughnuts or muffins. If you enjoy egg dishes but don't have time to prepare your favorite before work, try microwaving an egg while toasting two slices whole wheat or rye (whole-grain) bread. Add a slice of low-fat cheese for a healthful breakfast sandwich that's ready in minutes. And don't overlook leftovers. If you feel like cold pizza (which contains antioxidant-filled tomato sauce, calcium-rich cheese, and lots of veggies), have it. It's a good breakfast that's better than no breakfast at all.

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