

## *The Importance of Breakfast*

**T**he word 'fast' has come to be associated with people who go for long periods without food for a variety of reasons. In fact, you fast when you go several hours without food. Every morning you break your overnight fast when you eat breakfast. This meal is an important source of energy and nutrients for your body. However, not all Canadians begin their day with this healthy start.

### **Who skips breakfast?**

Recent Canadian studies reveal that 50 per cent of school children arrive at school without having eaten a complete breakfast. Five to 10 per cent have no breakfast at all.

A study of Canadian adults showed 18 per cent never eat breakfast. Up to 29 per cent skip breakfast one or more days each week.

While it is encouraging that most Canadians eat breakfast, many of us could improve our choices of what we eat.

### **What is a healthy breakfast?**

A healthy breakfast provides foods from at least three food groups from Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Here are some examples:

1. Cereal (hot or cold) - the grain products group  
 Milk - milk products group  
 Banana, sliced - vegetables and fruit group
2. Orange - vegetables and fruit group  
 Whole grain toast - grain products group  
 Cheese - milk products group
3. Apple Juice - vegetables and fruit group  
 Scrambled eggs - meat and alternatives group  
 Whole-wheat toast - grain products group  
 Fruit flavored yogurt - milk products group

There are many ways to dress up these basic menus if you have time. Try adding a variety of vegetables such as onion, tomatoes or mush-

rooms to the scrambled eggs. Consider the popular Scandinavian breakfast of an open-faced sandwich of whole wheat bread topped with white cheese and your favorite jam.

A healthy breakfast should consist of at least a quarter of your day's intake of food. Compare the size of your breakfast with your lunch or dinner to get a perspective on this goal.

Breakfast should consist of foods you enjoy, not something that you feel you are choking down. Explore alternatives if the usual breakfast fare does not appeal to you.

### **Why should I eat breakfast?**

A tasty breakfast is the best way to refuel the body after a night of sleep. Breakfast provides the energy for the morning's activities.

Some research suggests those who eat breakfast think better and feel better throughout the morning. Children who skip breakfast may be inattentive, irritable and learn poorly. This trend may be more noticeable in children with behavioral problems or poor eating habits. More studies need to be done before these observations can be confirmed.

It may surprise you that breakfast skippers generally do not make up the missed nutrients at their other meals. The intake of several key nutrients usually found in a breakfast meal, such as calcium, iron and fibre, is lower in people who skip breakfast. Adults tend to forget this applies to them as well. They realize that breakfast is important for others, such as their children, but skip it themselves.

Breakfast is a great time to consume foods from the Milk Products food group. This is especially important for adult women with their increased risk of developing osteoporosis. It is also a great

opportunity to add milk products to the diets of growing children. Dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese, fit well into a breakfast menu. These are excellent sources of calcium.

Eating breakfast regularly is also thought to help in long term weight control.

### **How can eating breakfast help me control my weight?**

People who skip breakfast often require a mid-morning snack. The common convenience choices, a doughnut or a high fat muffin, provide lots of calories but few nutrients.

People who work all morning without having breakfast find themselves snacking after dinner as a survival technique. This ensures the body has a calorie store for the next morning. Evening snacks, however, are often high fat foods with few nutrients.

It may be more difficult to sleep on nights you have had a heavy snack. This can perpetuate the cycle of poor sleep, difficulty waking and no time for breakfast. A healthy breakfast should be part of any sensible effort to control body weight.

When I occasionally eat breakfast, I often feel hungry during the morning. Why?

This is a common complaint of people who usually skip breakfast. The breakfast you ate may have been mostly carbohydrate foods such as toast and jam or cereal and skim milk. Carbohydrate provides you with energy for two to three hours. The energy in your body then needs refueling. A snack of fruit, yogurt or a bagel would get you through until lunch. These foods also provide your body with energy from carbohydrates. As this is your body's first choice of fuel, it is less likely to cause weight gain.

If you have no time to stop for a mid-morning snack, include some protein at breakfast, such as egg, cheese, ham, cottage cheese or peanut butter. These foods provide you with energy for a longer term. Combine one of these with a slice of bread or a bun and it will keep you satisfied all morning.

Eating breakfast and a mid-morning snack does not mean you will consume more calories per day; the calories are eaten earlier in the day when your body can use them for the day's activities.

### **I do not have time to eat breakfast!**

Breakfast does not have to take a long time to prepare and eat. Here are some quick and easy suggestions:

#### **The five-minute breakfast**

Cold cereals or instant oatmeal with milk can be eaten in a few minutes. Add a glass of juice to ensure there are three food groups present. An alternative is a delicious wake-up drink made by blending together milk, yogurt and fruit.

#### **Breakfast on the run**

Grab a bagel, a banana or a peanut butter and jam sandwich to eat either as you are getting ready or as you travel to work. Take along a juice box or a carton of milk.

#### **Breakfast at your desk**

Yogurt is great to pack and eat at your desk before you start work. A bagel, muffin or piece of fruit also work well. Most of us take a few minutes to organize our day. This is a perfect time to give our bodies the energy to carry out the day's tasks.

These examples are not all complete breakfasts. Once you are comfortable with having something to eat in the morning, you can add to it. A little organization the night before can help you to eat breakfast more consistently.

### **I get tired of the usual breakfast choices**

Use your imagination. Breakfast can be anything from last night's leftovers to your own secret recipe. Some suggestions are:

- soup (great on a cold day)
- grilled cheese and tomato sandwich
- left over pizza - cold or warmed up
- crepes or soft tortillas wrapped around leftovers
- crepes or soft tortillas buttered and spread with sliced bananas and a sprinkling of brown sugar and warmed in the microwave oven
- a parfait made with slices of fruit separated by layers of yogurt
- a fruit crisp - cold or warmed up

*Here is one of my favorite recipes for apple crisp. For a really quick dish use pie filling, cover with topping and microwave until warm. Add milk to ensure three food groups are present.*

## Apple Crisp

4 Cups (100ml) sliced, peeled apples  
2/3 Cup (150ml) brown sugar, packed  
1/2 Cup (125ml) flour  
1/2 Cup (125ml) oats  
1 Tsp (5ml) cinnamon

1 Tsp (5ml) nutmeg

1/3 Cup (75ml) soft margarine

Heat oven to 375 F (190 C). Use 8 inch square (2-litre) baking dish and place apple slices on the bottom. Mix remaining ingredients and sprinkle over the apples. Bake 30 minutes or until apples are tender. Serve warm or cold.

*To be even more imaginative, you can use breakfast ideas from other countries to add interesting variety to your breakfasts.*

**Cheesy Egg Muffin** - A Healthy version of an old favorite

1 whole English muffin per person

1 slice cheddar cheese

1 slice tomato

1 slice onion (if desired)

1 egg

Cut muffins in half and toast.

Place vegetables on the bottom half of the muffin, top with cheese. Broil as egg is cooking.

Prepare egg easy over in a teflon pan.

Place cooked egg over the cheese; top with half of toasted muffin.

Note: 2 egg whites can replace the egg for those on a low cholesterol diet.

*For those who prefer the convenience of a breakfast drink, these easily prepared shakes are delicious. Adding a banana will create a "creamy" texture.*

## Top of the Morning Shake

1 ripe banana

1/2 cup fruit juice or milk

1/2 cup fresh fruit

2 tablespoons frozen orange juice concentrate

1/2 cup crushed ice

Blend well.

## Fruit'n Yogurt Shake

Experiment with blending lower fat milk and yogurt with your favorite fruit in amounts that will give you the flavor and texture you prefer.

*One recipe of this popular breakfast snack can be prepared on the weekend to last all week.*

## Energy Bars

2/3 cup whole wheat flour

2/3 cup safflower oil

1 egg or 1/4 cup egg substitute

1/3 cup packed brown sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon or less salt

1 1/2 cups uncooked rolled oats

1 cup unsalted, low-fat Cheddar cheese, grated

3/4 cup raisins

1 cup apples, peeled and chopped

Mix flour, oil, egg, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, baking powder and salt with a wooden spoon; stir in oats, cheese and raisins. Add apples; stir. Drop by heaping tablespoons onto teflon baking sheets. Bake at 375( for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Store in tightly covered jar in refrigerator.

Perfect for breakfast with fresh orange or apple juice.

**Whatever you serve, start the day right and treat yourself to a healthy breakfast.**

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