

Breakfast: Your Secret Weapon

What do bagels, bran cereal and bananas have in common? They're good-for-you breakfast foods that might help keep you on the weight-loss straight and narrow.

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Research has shown that people who skip breakfast may not be as successful with weight management as those people who eat breakfast regularly. Why? Eating breakfast may help you reduce snacking and avoid overeating.

Food is fuel

Eating breakfast is like filling up a gas tank. When you wake up in the morning, your body is low on fuel, like a car running on empty, explains Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD, director of nutrition for WebMD. A morning meal can kick-start your engine by giving your body energy.

Zelman warns that skipping breakfast may make you more likely to overeat later in the day to make up for the missed meal.

In fact, a study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that breakfast eaters fall prey to impulse snacking less often than non-breakfast eaters.

Unleaded or diesel?

Not all fuels are created equal. Most people will get more mileage from a small bran muffin and a cup of fat-free milk than they do from a large glass of juice. That's because the sugar in the juice is a much more rapidly used energy source than that derived from the muffin and milk.

"The ideal breakfast is based on carbohydrate and protein," says G. Harvey Anderson, PhD, professor in the department of nutritional sciences at the University of Toronto. He theorizes that the most satisfying breakfasts deliver a quick shot of energy (by raising blood sugar levels rapidly) and then a longer term energy boost from high-fiber, complex-carbohydrate, protein-containing foods that slow digestion.

What does that mean for your sugar cereal? Toss a handful into a bowl of low-fat yogurt and then mix it up with some fiber-rich fruit. Other tag-team breakfasts include:

- Low-fat cheese and tomato slices on a whole-wheat English muffin
- High-fiber cereal with fat-free or lowfat milk and dried or fresh fruit
- Peanut butter and jelly on multi-grain bread
- Hard-boiled or scrambled eggs (or egg whites) with a couple of wheat crackers

- Low-fat yogurt and a grain-rich cereal bar
- A banana and a small handful of peanuts or almonds

Banish no-time-for-breakfast excuses

Excuse: *I don't have time to make myself breakfast. The only things available to me at work are doughnuts and cookies from the vending machine.*

When time is of the essence, think portable. Try a hard-boiled egg (keep a few in the fridge at all times) and a couple of crackers or string cheese and a piece of fruit. And for those real crunch times, keep packets of instant oatmeal, high-fiber breakfast bars and mini boxes of raisins stashed in your desk drawer.

Excuse: *I just can't eat before 1:00 p.m.*

You don't have to eat when the roosters crow, but it is a wise idea to eat within several hours of waking up. If you can't stomach much, try a few grapes or a wheat cracker and half a glass of juice. After a few days, your body might naturally look forward to this a.m. fuel-up and you can try more substantial meals.

Excuse: *I'd like to eat breakfast but I'm afraid it will set my hunger into overdrive.*

Many people experience less erratic eating patterns (like mid-afternoon and after-dinner munchies) when they eat several small snacks and meals throughout the day. Anderson says that in addition to being leaner, frequent nutritious mini-meal eaters — as opposed to those who eat one to two big meals per day — are often associated with cleaner bills of health.