

The Most Important Meal of the Day

We've all heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, now learn why. Breakfast is directly correlated to cognitive development and mental performance. After sleeping for 8 hours (yes, you should be getting 8 hours of sleep each night), the body needs fuel to power the body and the mind. Not having breakfast can adversely affect your daily performance by impacting your energy level and mental focus. Breakfast should consist of quality nutrition. Moreover, people, woman especially, who do not eat breakfast end up eating more throughout the latter part of the day. Therefore, it is not in the best interest for anyone to skip breakfast as a measure of reducing caloric intake.

Several of my clients ask me about healthy breakfast ideas, and in truth, it's a dilemma that many of us face each day. Either we don't have time for breakfast, or we don't have many healthy options on hand. A good breakfast is an ideal way to start changing to a healthful diet. The food choices are simple, and you can measure your progress quite easily. By eating healthier earlier in the day you will be less likely to reach for sugary snacks, caffeine or simple carbohydrate foods later in the day.

Research suggests that breakfast eaters are leaner than those who skip the morning meal, with studies suggesting that missing breakfast is associated with up to a fourfold increase in the risk of obesity. High-fiber cereals are central to breakfast's health benefits and can help people reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and even intestinal polyps and colon cancer.

What is a Healthy Breakfast? A healthy breakfast should contain some protein and some complex carbohydrate (has fiber present). Protein sources are low fat meats, eggs, dairy (milk, cheese or yogurt), beans, or soy. Complex carbohydrates can be found in whole grains, vegetables and fruits. A good example of a healthy breakfast might be something simple like a hardboiled egg, an orange, and a bowl of whole grain cereal with low fat milk. When combined in a meal or a snack, protein and complex carbohydrates (with fiber present) satisfy your hunger and will keep you feeling full until lunch time.

Stay away from the sugary cereals, syrups, pastries, and white breads because they are digested quickly and will leave you hungry and tired in a couple of hours. You need to have some protein at breakfast. This will slow down the absorption and digestion of your meal.

Be Good to Yourself by Eating a Healthy Breakfast Every Morning. Tomorrow morning, remember that eating a healthy breakfast is the best way to start your day... Notice how much better you feel through the morning and the rest of the day when you don't skip breakfast. If you can't stomach anything first thing try something bland like a banana, yogurt or slice of whole wheat toast. Experiment until you find a healthful breakfast you can really enjoy.

Here are some healthy, quick breakfast ideas the whole family will enjoy.

Raw Organic Bar and a whole Piece of Fruit – This is about the quickest breakfast you can eat. Raw Organic Bars (my favorite energy bars) have 200 calories and a good amount of protein and fiber. Add in a large whole piece of fruit and your total calories will come to around 300 calories.

Smoothies - Smoothies are certainly a great way to get a good dose of fruit. Chop up some fresh fruit, throw it in the blender and you have a healthy and delicious breakfast. Add yogurt, nut butter or milk for protein.

Breakfast Muffins - For breakfast try a savory or fruit muffin. For healthier muffins use whole wheat flour and instead of sugar mash a ripe banana or a little honey into the mixture. Unless you're an early riser you probably won't have enough time to make muffins in the morning. Simply make them ahead and either freeze or keep in an air-tight container for a few days. Try making the mini-muffin size, adding a ¼ cup crushed walnuts to the mix for protein and having a piece of fruit with it.

Wholesome Eggs - Eggs are very versatile. Try a veggie omelet with a little cheese or scrambled eggs with chopped tomatoes. Try a prepare-ahead breakfast casserole for a hearty family breakfast. Scrambled, poached, hard boiled...any way you like them...they are a perfect protein.

Oatmeal - Making your own oatmeal is much healthier than the flavored instant packets. Cook up according to packet instructions and add a little fruit for extra flavor. Add a few crushed walnuts for added omega-3 and a protein source and sweeten with a little real maple syrup...a much better choice than brown sugar.

Healthy Breakfast Bar - Make up a batch of healthy breakfast bars the day before and use them for a quick, on-the-go breakfast. Use a low-sugar recipe and include lots of healthy dried fruits.

Fantastic Fruit Salad - Serve a chopped fruit salad with a yogurt dip. Mini muffins are delicious dipped in yogurt too.

Breakfast Burrito - Scramble some eggs and place them in a whole wheat tortilla with chopped tomatoes, veggies or other favorite toppings. Always add cheese to the top of your dishes (you will use less and still taste the flavor) and be sure to choose aged cheeses. These have a stronger taste and will need less present to add flavor to the dish.

Spruce up your Toast - Try whole wheat bread and serve with peanut or almond butter and sliced bananas, light cream cheese and raisins (sprinkle a little cinnamon on top), or light cream cheese and a fruit jam (pure, no-sugar added jam is best).

Pizza for Breakfast - Why not? split a couple of whole wheat English muffins in half, top with a little pizza sauce, grated cheese and some chopped turkey or even eggs. Place under the grill for a few minutes and you have a nutritious breakfast pizza.

Angela Pifer is a Certified Nutritionist, with a MS in nutrition from Bastyr University, in private practice, specializing in food sensitivities, emotional eating, digestive conditions, sports nutrition & weight loss. She founded Nutrition Northwest Co in 2005; the premier provider of sound nutrition and wellness advice in the Northwest with offices in Seattle and Kirkland. Angela has a unique approach to helping her patients create new healthier habits: offering customized nutrition programs that inspire & educate along with a high degree of support & accountability to help them become fit & fabulous from the inside out.