

Healthy Breakfast

Breakfast literally means 'breaking the fast', as you have had no food or 'fasted' since the day before.

Breakfast helps top up the energy stores you have used up each night whilst your body repairs and renews itself. It also gives you energy for your morning activities, whether at work, school, home or out and about. While breakfast is often quoted as 'the most important meal of the day', this may not be strictly true. It's more helpful to say that no meal should be categorised as more important than another, and daily food intake should be considered as a whole. Skipping meals, whether it be breakfast, lunch or dinner, is not advised. Establishing a regular eating pattern has been shown to improve glycaemic control, reduce likelihood of weight gain and curb hunger pangs. However, it is estimated that up to one third of us still regularly miss breakfast. Many of us put this down to time pressures in the morning, but with a little planning, you can find a breakfast choice to suit your lifestyle.

Is breakfast really important?

Yes - apart from providing energy (calories) to kick-start your day, a healthy breakfast provides essential nutrients that the body needs, such as fibre, vitamins and key minerals such as calcium and iron.

Research has shown that people who eat breakfast have more balanced diets than those who skip it, are less likely to be overweight, lose weight more successfully if overweight, and have reduced risk of certain diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Missing breakfast may increase feelings of hunger later on in the day, resulting in snacking on less healthy foods without necessarily catching up on essential nutrients. Eating breakfast may also help to improve mental performance, concentration and mood – three more good reasons to eat something in the morning.

What makes a healthy breakfast?

Breakfast should provide about 20-25% of your daily nutritional requirements, and it's not just about having any breakfast – it's about having a healthy breakfast.



Breakfast built from the main food groups below will give you an excellent start to the day:

Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, rice, potatoes, and pasta provide energy, B vitamins, some iron and fibre. Cereals are a really good choice: as well as being quick and easy to prepare, they often are fortified with vitamins, iron and calcium to contribute to your daily nutritional requirements. However be careful to check the labels, as some of these products have added sugar and salt. Porridge, bread, rolls, English muffins, scones, malt loaf, fruit bread, currant buns and bagels all provide good sources of energy, mainly as starchy carbohydrate, that will help kick start your metabolism, and they're all usually low in fat too. Choose wholegrain varieties whenever possible to ensure a good fibre intake, and try to avoid cereals coated in sugar. Evidence suggests that porridge oats for breakfast may have a positive effect on total cholesterol concentration when compared to skipping breakfast, making porridge a winning choice. If you're pushed for time, try an oat-based rumbler as a 'packed breakfast' – the night before, place some porridge oats in a pot and cover with enough low fat milk or yoghurt to soak into the oats, add some fresh or dried fruit on top, sprinkle with a bit of cinnamon for added flavour and store in the fridge. Then, in the morning just grab from the fridge with a spoon before you leave the house – a perfect breakfast on the go.

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins and fibre. Breakfast is a perfect time to boost your 5-a-day intake. On your cereal, try chopped fresh fruit, like a

Breakfast should provide about 20-25% of your daily nutritional requirements, and it's not just about having any breakfast – it's about having a healthy breakfast.

banana, or some dried, stewed or canned (in juice rather than syrup) fruit, or add half a grapefruit or fruit salad to your usual breakfast. A small glass (150ml) of pure fruit juice also counts as one serving of your 5-a-day. For something different, try a fresh fruit smoothie – just blend some fruit of your choice with low fat yogurt or milk. Frozen berries, fruit in season or ripe fruit are all ideal for making smoothies. Alternatively, give vegetables a try at breakfast time, mushrooms, baked beans or tomatoes on toast make a tasty change when you have a bit more time.

Milk and dairy foods give you protein, calcium and B vitamins. Calcium is essential to keep your bones strong and healthy, whatever your age, and a serving of milk on your cereal can give you up to one third of your daily calcium needs. Use low fat milks like skimmed, semi-skimmed or 1%. If you don't like milk on cereal, try a glass of milk on its own or in a smoothie, or have a pot of low fat yogurt instead. Natural yoghurt is delicious topped with fruit and a sprinkle of muesli. If you use milk and other products not made from cows' milk such as soya, oat, coconut, almond or rice, make sure they are unsweetened and fortified with calcium.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein give you protein, iron and vitamins. These foods are not essential at breakfast, but they can add variety. Try not to have meat at breakfast every day, and choose cooking methods such as grilling or poaching instead of frying in fat. Poached, boiled or scrambled eggs, baked beans, grilled kippers or smoked haddock are healthier options than bacon and sausages, which are higher in saturated fat.

Foods and drinks high in fat and sugar give you energy but are generally low in vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Limit these foods and choose low fat sunflower, olive or vegetable oil based spreads where possible and spread thinly. Choose low sugar, wholegrain breakfast cereals instead of sugar-coated, refined varieties. Avoid fizzy drinks, biscuits and crisps at breakfast and use fruit to add natural sweetness instead of sugar on your cereal.

Remember to include a drink. Water, milk, pure fruit juice, tea and coffee all supply vital fluids. Use low fat milks and ask for 'skinny' coffee when out and about. Being well hydrated also helps you to concentrate better.

Summary

If you can't face eating first thing, try to eat within two hours of getting up. Keep some healthy wholegrain

Here's an example meal plan for a quick and easy breakfast:

- bowl of fortified wholegrain cereal with semi-skimmed/skimmed or 1% milk
- fruit (fresh/tinned in juice/dried/frozen)
- small glass of pure, unsweetened fruit juice
- wholegrain or granary toast with poly monounsaturated reduced low fat spread or wholegrain bread or rolls, wholegrain English muffins, malt loaf, fruit bread, currant bun or bagel.

cereal at work, or if you are breakfasting on the go, choose a shop, café or sandwich bar that has healthy choices like wholegrain toast or cereal, porridge, low fat yoghurts, pure fruit juices, fresh fruit salads and smoothies with low fat milk. Keep pastries and croissants as an occasional treat rather than an everyday eat, as they are high in fat and calories.

If you are in a hurry, make sure you have foods to hand that you can grab, such as a banana, yoghurt with muesli, instant porridge or toast. Find out if your children's school has a breakfast club to make sure that they have time to sit and have a healthy meal. Alternatively lay the table 'buffet-style' (get the children to help/do the night before if necessary) and let the children serve themselves.

Eating a healthy breakfast every day will give you the best possible start, as well as enhancing the overall nutritional quality of your daily food intake. Planning ahead or grabbing something easy can help if you are short of time, but remember to include at least three of the four main food groups on a regular basis: starchy foods, fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy foods and meat, fish, eggs and non-dairy sources of protein. Avoid food and drink that is high in fat and sugar as these are often low in vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Remember to include a drink, as being well hydrated will help you to concentrate throughout the day.

Further information

Food Fact Sheets on topics in this sheet including *Healthy Packed Lunches* and *Weight Loss* can be downloaded at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

