Making the Most of Breakfast

Breaking one’s fast from a restful night of sleep with nourishing foods charges all body cylinders. In fact, our mood and performance for the entire day is dependent on a good breakfast, as it sets the stage for balanced body chemistry and hormones. Compared to breakfast-skippers, children and adults alike who adequately fuel up in the morning have more energy and better emotional stability and find it easier to maintain their body weight. If you seek motivation to eat a good breakfast, keep reading; if you are stuck in a rut and in need of creative recipes, keep reading. Breakfast should be relaxed and nourishing… and non-negotiable.

Breakfast Eaters Think Better

One study following a group of students found that they had better mental performance, including attention and memory, after eating breakfast compared to when the same group didn’t eat anything. The researchers also compared sugary ready-to-eat cereal to oatmeal and found oatmeal’s nutritional advantage (more nourishing whole food meal) made it a better choice at improving brain power and encouraging better test scores.[1] Additional stats show higher test grades and better school attendance in breakfast eaters than in non-breakfast eaters too.[2] Bottom line: to excel in whatever we do, whether it be school, work, play or relationships, we need breakfast to be at the top of our mental game.

Well-nourished students in Madrid who consumed an adequate breakfast (more than 20 percent of their daily energy) achieved better reasoning scores in the scholastic aptitude test (SAT) than did breakfast-skippers.[3] What a good motivator for your profession-aspiring teen: “If you are college-bound, eat breakfast!” Same goes for more mature folks: a group of adults aged sixty-one to seventy-nine years who consumed a nourishing breakfast of such whole foods as whole grains and eggs fared better on memory tests in the morning than when that same group ate sweetened cereals or doughnuts.[4] So a nourishing breakfast is important for the mental health of both young whippersnappers and those with a few miles on their tires.

Breakfast Eaters Control Weight Better

Those who skip breakfast tend to eat more calories throughout the day, ultimately leading to weight gain.[5] Here’s one reason: skipping breakfast eventually results in insulin becoming less sensitive, that is, insulin resistance. Insulin is a hormone that carts sugar around in the blood, taking it either to be used as cell energy or to be converted to fat and stored. If body cell receptors (acting like miniature doors) are “less sensitive” or resistant to insulin, when sugar-loaded insulin comes to deliver its cargo to a cell, the cell refuses entry. This results in excess sugars floating around the bloodstream. The body then tries to produce more insulin to get the sugar into the resistant cells, and a cycle begins. This precarious scenario causes not only weight gain, hypoglycemic symptoms (light headedness, low energy, brain-fog), but contributes to obesity and heart disease as well. Eventually the body may become unable to make insulin, which allows blood sugar to rage out of control, causing type-2 diabetes (simply an extreme case of insulin resistance).[6]

Not surprisingly, obesity and insulin resistance syndrome rates are 50 percent lower in breakfast-eaters compared to those who frequently skip breakfast.[7] Breakfast-eaters also tend to make overall better food choices throughout the day. Skipping meals encourages overeating at later meals and “the munchies” for more snacks. A study at Brown Medical School evaluating approximately four thousand people who have kept weight off successfully found that 78 percent ate breakfast daily.[8]
On the flip side, an earlier study from the University of Massachusetts found that people who habitually missed the morning meal were four times more likely to be obese.[9] Simply put, breakfast gets one’s metabolism off to a good start and keeps the body more balanced all day long.

What Not To Eat

A typical, politically correct, fat-phobic breakfast might include a refined-flour muffin, a glass of OJ, non-fat sweetened yogurt and, worst of all, an egg white omelet. Oh, and don’t forget the cup of caffeinated Joe. Even if these continental-style breakfast choices are low in sugar, the scarcity of nourishing proteins and healing fats makes them miserable choices for nourishing a healthy body. Even worse is Americans’ reliance on boxed cold cereals involving some menagerie of machine-generated crunchy puffs of brightly colored shapes and candy-like creations.

Let’s review four compelling reasons to opt out of these concoctions. First, the sugar content of many breakfast cereals rivals that found in a chocolate glazed donut.[10] (For more info on the damaging effects of excess sugar consumption, see “Zapping Sugar Cravings” in the Fall 2010 Wise Traditions.) Second, the process necessary to achieve these kid-enticing flakes, shapes and crunch is called extrusion. This process combines high temperatures and high pressure, ultimately rendering many nutrients useless as well as damaging the residing proteins (or amino acids) within the grain and making them toxic to ingest.[11]

A third reason boxed cereals are a poor choice for breakfast is inadequate preparation, making the grains difficult to digest. To get the best nourishment and digestibility out of grains, it is best to prepare them in such a way that inactivates such compounds as enzyme inhibitors,[12] which would otherwise hamper digestion, and phytic acid, a compound that combines with minerals and prevents their absorption.[13,14] The traditional practices of soaking and sprouting grains accomplishes this through pre-digestion of the food. This explains why sprouted foods are less likely to produce allergic reactions in those who are sensitive.[15] And gluten-containing flours, especially wheat, are the main ingredient in most cereals and happen to be one of the most troublesome allergy-causing foods.

Dr. Braly, co-author of Dangerous Grains, believes that undiagnosed sensitivities to gluten and other grain proteins contribute to many autoimmune and neurological conditions, bone loss, chronic pain, learning problems, fatigue, intestinal complaints and more.[16] The wide use and acceptance of wheat may be why many folks who have trouble with gluten fail to consider it as an underlying contributor. Moreover, there is evidence that high-gluten diets alter the normal lining of the small intestine in healthy people,[17] which opens up the possibility that gluten, particularly in large amounts, is not ideal for many of us.

Finally, even if you avoid sugary cereals and opt for the “healthier” choices, fiber is typically a focal point, often with the promise of promoting “regularity”. In fact, just one cup of some fiber-fortified cereals dishes up more fiber than the highest recommended dose for fiber laxatives. However, recent research shows that overdoing fiber – from foods or supplements – can have detrimental effects on the body. Konstantin Monastyrsky, author of Fiber Menace, offers compelling arguments and research that proves that high-fiber diets contribute to a whole host of conditions – the very conditions believed to be improved by more fiber – including hemorrhoids, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, and even colon cancer.

Monastyrsky explains that too much fiber creates large stools that over-stretch the intestinal tract, eventually causing damage. Also, bacteria in the intestinal tract ferment fiber and when too much fermentation occurs with excess fiber, the acidity that results causes intestinal inflammation, bloating and gas. Furthermore, fiber interferes with food’s digestion in the stomach, resulting in heartburn and
Ultimately, fiber isn’t the super-nutrient it’s blindly believed to be, especially the form found in hard-to-digest, highly-processed cereals. The small amount of fiber humans are designed to consume should come from whole, unprocessed foods that are properly prepared, such as cooked vegetables and soaked grains and legumes or sour leavened flours. Once again, whole, unprocessed foods prepared in the wise ways of our ancestors win in the end!

To drive these anti-boxed cereal points home, Sally Fallon Morell tells us in *Nourishing Traditions* about an unpublished experiment performed at the University of Michigan in 1960. The experiment was actually in jest; however, the results are no laughing matter.

Three groups of six rats were observed: group one was fed cornflakes and water; group two the cardboard box that the cornflakes came in and water; and the control group received rat chow and water. The control group remained in good health through the testing period. However, the rats fed cornflakes and water died before those fed the cardboard box. From apparent outward behavior and autopsies, the cornflake-eating rats showed signs of severe insulin instability caused by dramatic insults to blood sugar and damage to the nervous system. Who knew that those consuming boxed cereals would be better off choking down the thirty-cent box instead![19]

**The Rules of a Good Breakfast**

Breakfast can be as simple or involved as you like, but there are four rules that should be followed:

1. Fat and protein should be the featured nutrients. For most people, a carbohydrate-loaded breakfast based on vegetable juices, fruits, grains, flour and sugar doesn’t offer enough nutritional bang to get the day off to a good start. Breakfast-candidate foods (preferably produced through non-toxic, pastured-based agriculture) well-endowed with protein and fat include eggs, meats, fish, full-fat dairy foods such as yogurt or kefir, nuts and seeds, coconut oil, lard, butter and avocados. Once these fats and proteins are decided on, fruits, vegetables, tubers and whole grains make a wonderful side note.

2. Make at least a portion of breakfast food easily digestible through soaking grains, sour leavening of flours for breads, culturing dairy products, or fermenting fruits and vegetables. In *Nourishing Traditions*, Sally Fallon Morell reminds us that, “Almost everywhere in the world people ate fermented foods on a daily basis. They often ate them for breakfast, no doubt because after a night of sleep the body needs something that is rapidly and easily digested.”[20]

3. Don’t rush! Get yourself in the habit of going to sleep early enough to allow time in the morning to relax through your morning meal.

4. Plan ahead. Know what you will have tomorrow, whether it is going to be a beautifully laid out fare with flowers and a table cloth or something you throw together in under two minutes.

One reason protein and fat are so essential for breakfast is that they are critical for overall brain chemistry balance. And one of the best sources of protein and fat is the incredible, edible egg! Eggs, laid by sun-bathing, bug-munching chickens, provide an especially brainy breakfast, being the richest source of the nutrient choline. This brain-loving vitamin is a key constituent of cell membranes, giving them flexibility and structure. It also provides a large portion of two fat-like brain molecules that account for a high percentage of the brain’s total mass, meaning choline supports optimal brain function.[21]
Incredible Eggs

Talking about eggs, an interesting study funded by the American Egg Board found that choosing two eggs for breakfast over a bagel resulted in more weight loss and higher energy levels, even though both breakfasts consisted of the same number of calories. Now, there are three take-home points from this study. One, protein is the body’s metabolism controller, creating balance and stabilizing appetite and hunger. Two, grains, especially refined varieties and definitely without the accompaniment of protein and fat, typically send one’s body chemistry into a frenzy while trying to recover and compensate. Three, calories are not just calories; their source makes a big difference in how they work in the body and on our metabolism.

A tip from Sally Fallon Morell on fried eggs: cook them sunny side up with a lid on the pan. This keeps the yolk soft and ensures the white congeals. Nothing puts children off eggs like runny whites. Also with scrambled eggs, they need to be really well beaten so no white appears in the cooked eggs – some children can’t stand to see the whites in scrambled eggs.

Breakfast Basics

Keeping to a basic, old-fashioned breakfast menu is fine and dandy – eggs (prepared any way: scrambled, poached, boiled, fried, omelet) with a side of sausage or bacon from pastured animals; soaked porridge loaded with butter, coconut oil, nuts, seeds and berries; or French toast (made with properly prepared sour dough or sprouted bread) served with sausage, butter and a maple syrup-sweetened fruit sauce with a side of berries and cream. However, there are days when it is fun to step outside the box, and when that day comes, consider these inspirational ideas:

- Breakfast soup: “For many cultures, soup is a breakfast food. The Japanese begin their day with a bowl of fish broth and rice. French children traditionally consumed leftover soup before they started off to school.”[23]
- Meat and egg muffins (Meffins!): The variations for scrumptious morning breakfast muffins are endless with different meats, sausages, vegetables and cheese. Make a big batch and freeze your favorite.
- Scrapple or liverwurst (pâté-like foods made from organ meats): sliced and fried until the outside is crispy along with scrambled eggs or stuffed in a breakfast burrito.
- Fruit and cheese sundae: Cottage cheese or ricotta with berries, nuts and seeds piled high in a fun fluted glass.
- Homemade cold cereal or granola: There are properly prepared cereal and granola recipes in Eat Fat Lose Fat by Mary Enig, Ph.D. Serve with cream or cultured dairy product.
- Dinner leftovers: Salmon patties, roast with gravy and fixings, shrimp stir-fry, egg or chicken salad, simple buffalo patties with fixings.
- Smoked salmon: Include with cream cheese or butter on properly prepared crackers or sourdough bread.

No-Time-For-Breakfast Breakfasts

Being rushed for time is still no excuse to bypass this all-important meal; keep this list of last-minute grab-and-go ideas on the fridge. Note, many of these ideas must be made beforehand to have available for those rushed mornings (e.g. hardboiled eggs and muffins). Also, eating while in a hurry
is never ideal for digestion and assimilation of your lovingly prepared food, so do your best to make these rushed meals occasional.

• Yogurt pops: A simple mix of yogurt, frozen berries, vanilla or almond extract and egg yolks blended and frozen in popsicle molds or paper cups with wooden popsicle sticks.

• Smoothies in a thermos: Pour your favorite smoothie into a thermos to take along on your way to school, work, or play-date.

• Granola breakfast bars: Pre-made batch of your favorite.

• Apple donuts: Cored apple, sliced into thin rounds. Slather one apple slice with nut butter and sprinkle with anything else you desire: dried fruit, crumbled dried banana chips, cinnamon. Top with another apple slice and enjoy (thanks to my friend Julia for this fun and simple idea!).

• Cheese and crispy nuts: What could be simpler! You can include a few dates for some natural sweetness.

• Hard boiled eggs: Have them on hand for grab and go.

In Conclusion

You can’t beat the feeling of starting your day off with a breakfast that settles well, gets your brain cells firing, and keeps you feeling vibrant and energetic all morning. For some, fueling one’s family with nourishing foods is routine, yet for others, it may be a habit you need to start; either way, with the tools now at your disposal, there are no excuses not to make breakfast-time easier, yummier and more interesting in your household.

[This article appeared in Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts, the quarterly magazine of the Weston A. Price Foundation, Spring 2011, pages 62-69.]

References


12. Ibid., p 25.


20. Ibid., p. 478.


