

Power breakfasts

[Image]

Get the most from your morning meal.

If your morning routine consists of running to the bus with a thermos of coffee or balancing a mug on your dash, you're giving short shrift to the most important meal of the day. Compared with breakfast skippers, women who eat a morning meal have more nutritious diets, lower blood cholesterol levels, better success with weight control and increased mental alertness.

BREAKFAST TO GO

If breakfast is so great for us, why do so many active women skip or short-change it? Kathy, a 42-year-old fitness walker, echoes a classic complaint, "I'm just not hungry when I wake up. Besides, I rarely have enough time to get ready for work, much less eat a full breakfast." Others shun it because they are dieting or they dislike the traditional morning fare. And there are those who simply don't eat enough.

If you have no time for a sit-down course, you can always munch on the run. On your commute to work or to a fitness center, put lowfat milk in your travel mug to enjoy with a bagel and a banana. Fill a baggie with dry cereal or put a slice of lowfat cheese in a pita pocket. Prepare your meal the night before, and you can simply grab it and go during the morning rush hour.

RUNNING ON EMPTY

Because muscles are hungriest for carbohydrates within the first two hours after a workout, a carbohydrate-centered breakfast, rather than a high-protein, high-fat meal, is best for morning exercisers. Endurance athletes, particularly those who exercise more than an hour a day, should also load up on carbohydrates in the morning.

Exercising on an empty stomach isn't wise, especially if your workout is strenuous. Without adequate carbohydrate stores, your blood sugar levels will drop. At best, you won't have optimal energy for your workout. At worst, you could develop low blood sugar symptoms: sudden weakness, dizziness or anxiety. A piece of fruit, toast with jam, even a glass of milk prior to exercise will help sustain you.

THE CALORIE BUDGET

To maintain your energy levels throughout the day, eat two thirds of your calories (1,000 to 1,400 calories) by early afternoon. This way you'll be less likely to overeat at dinner or give in to late night sugar cravings. If you budget one third of those calories for breakfast, this means eating one of the following:

- * a bowl of cereal, a banana, lowfat milk and juice.
- * a bagel with peanut butter, nonfat yogurt and fruit.
- * a muffin and nonfat yogurt.

* several ready-mix packets of hot cereal (most contain only 100 calories) with nonfat yogurt and fruit.

An athlete who is trying to gain weight or a woman with a higher metabolism could eat larger portions or add a morning snack.

TRADITIONAL CHOICES

Cereal is my top choice for breakfast: It's quick, convenient and carbohydrate-dense. Try different toppings, such as bananas, blueberries (fresh or frozen), raisins or even canned fruit. Flavor it with cinnamon, maple syrup or vanilla. Mix different brands. I keep about 15 boxes of cereal in my cupboard, so I can mix and match according to my taste preference for the day.

Because female athletes need extra iron, look for iron-fortified cereals which have more iron than the unenriched, natural- types such as granola and shredded wheat. To enhance the absorption of iron, drink orange juice or eat a vitamin C fruit (grapefruit, cantaloupe, strawberries).

Breads, hot cereals and shakes make quick, easy meals. Here are a few tips:

* Bake or buy several batches of muffins. Freeze them and pop one or two into the microwave each morning.

* Bake or buy a loaf of quick bread (date, banana, pumpkin). Slice and freeze. Toast for breakfast.

* Bake apple crisp on the weekend, halving the butter and sugar. Freeze and reheat portions.

* Mix a smoothie. Blend 1/2 cup frozen fruit with 1/2 cup yogurt, 1/2 cup juice and 1/4 t. cinnamon. Or blend a banana with 1/2 cup yogurt, 1/2 cup skim milk, 1/2 t. vanilla and 1/4 t. coconut extract.

UNORTHODOX BREAKFASTS

Breakfast doesn't have to be traditional. Try the following variations:

* Bake a few potatoes on Sunday evening and reheat them in the microwave while you shower. Top with nonfat yogurt or cottage cheese.

* Make a quick breakfast pizza by toasting an English muffin, topping each half with tomato sauce and lowfat mozzarella cheese and broiling it until the cheese melts.

* Make soup over the weekend and reheat it, or find a quality, lowfat brand in your supermarket (Hains, Pritikin).

* Check your refrigerator for appetizing leftovers to heat up- Chinese food, last night's pizza or pasta, a casserole.

* Cook a favorite grain (rice, quinoa, kasha, millet) on the weekend to reheat later.

By Nancy Clark, Jan.-Feb. 1992

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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