

The Breakfast Club

By Jill Weisenberger, M.S., R.D., C.D.E.

Breakfast has certainly gotten its share of accolades--and not just from your mother. In a study of women, eating breakfast daily resulted in healthier cholesterol levels than skipping breakfast. In 2006, the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that breakfast-skippers had lower intakes of several vitamins and minerals including potassium, calcium, iron and vitamin C compared to their breakfast-loving counterparts. The first meal has been credited for everything from being thinner to improving memory and test-taking skills.

Preparing a nutritious meal doesn't have to be complicated or time consuming. If your first meal of the day is desperate for a makeover, our guide is just what you need.

Your Perfect Breakfast If...

You don't have time for breakfast

If your morning routine is rushed, and you typically grab a piece of fruit or skip eating altogether, remember that breakfast doesn't have to be a sit-down meal. "It doesn't matter how busy you are, you still need energy to tackle work, family and athletic training," says sports nutritionist Nancy Clark, author of Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook. She recommends taking a few minutes the night before to pack a quick grab-and-go meal for the car or during a work break.

Quick fix: Pack a bag with granola, nonfat or low-fat yogurt, banana and a spoon stored overnight in the fridge, so it's ready and waiting for the morning rush hour. Choose unflavored yogurt and add your own fruit or honey as a sweetener. Or chase a peanut butter-and-banana sandwich on whole-wheat bread with a 1-cup carton of nonfat or low-fat milk or 100 percent fruit juice.

You're just not hungry

If you always skip breakfast, you're probably eating too much at night, suggests registered dietitian Elizabeth Ward, author of The Pocket Idiot's Guide to the New Food Pyramids. So the first step is to spread your food out over the course of your day. If you're queasy first thing in the morning, Ward recommends eating breakfast a little later in the morning or breaking it up into two small snacks.

Quick fix: Drink a cup of orange juice before you dash out to start your day, then follow up with instant oatmeal made with milk and topped with raisins or dried cranberries a few hours later.

You hate breakfast food

No one says you have to start your day with eggs or cereal. Look to breakfast options around the world for some fresh ideas. In some parts of India, a popular breakfast includes a spicy yogurt and rice dish. Noodles and soup are common in other parts of

Asia. To Ward, a good breakfast has complex carbohydrates, protein and fruits or vegetables. "Breakfast could be a half sandwich and some orange juice; leftover pizza and fruit; or last night's dinner. Just eat," she urges.

Quick fix: Choose whatever healthy foods you like, just balance them among three or four food groups. What about leftover lasagna or chicken and vegetable stir-fry over instant brown rice?

You're heading out for a training run

Resist the temptation to hit the pavement with nothing in your stomach but a few swallows of juice or sports drink. You'll perform better if you eat a nutrient-packed meal before exercising. Aim for at least three food groups, says endurance athlete and board-certified sports dietitian Suzanne Girard Eberle, author of *Endurance Sports Nutrition*. Choose a grain for some complex carbs, a calcium-rich food and some fruit. "If you have longer than two hours before you run, add some protein or healthy fat for sustaining power." Be smart about how much you eat, or you'll risk getting a bellyache. "Experiment with the timing. Most athletes need to eat one to two hours before they run," Eberle adds.

For the day of the race, don't try anything new. "The pre-event breakfast and the training breakfast should be the same," says Clark, "because part of training is to train the intestinal tract. The best pre-exercise breakfast includes tried-and-true foods that are easy to digest."

Quick fix: Try yogurt, fruit and oatmeal; if you have time before the run, stir in some peanut butter or nuts. Pour yourself a bowl of cereal with milk along with a glass of juice; if time permits, include a hard-boiled egg or a cheese stick. Or eat a bagel with jam and some yogurt; if you don't plan on running for a while, enjoy some scrambled eggs or spread some peanut butter on your bagel.

You're trying to lose a few pounds

Most importantly, don't skip breakfast or turn to low-calorie, low-fiber cereal in an attempt to control calories. The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), a listing of thousands of people who have lost at least 30 pounds and kept it off for one year or more, indicates that 78 percent of the NWCR participants eat breakfast every day.

Quick fix: Fill up on water-rich and fiber-rich fruits and veggies. You'll get more forkfuls for the calories. Try a big fruit salad with some reduced-fat cottage cheese and granola; a mix of colorful bell peppers and onions with scrambled eggs and salsa with a slice of whole-grain toast; or a high-fiber cereal and milk.

Recipes

BANANA BREAD

From Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook

Banana bread is a favorite for pre-marathon carbohydrate loading and for snacking during long-distance bike rides and hikes.

3 large, well-ripened bananas
1 egg or 2 egg whites
2 tbsp oil, preferably canola
1/3 cup low-fat milk
1/3 to 1/2 cup sugar
1 tsp salt
1 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp baking powder
1 1/2 cups flour, preferably half whole-wheat and half white

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mash bananas with a fork. Add egg, oil, milk, sugar, salt, baking soda and baking powder. Beat well. Gently blend the flour into the banana mixture and stir for 20 seconds or until moistened. Pour into a 4-inch by 8-inch loaf pan that has been lightly oiled, treated with cooking spray, or lined with wax paper. Bake for 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted near the middle comes out clean. Let cool for five minutes before removing from the pan.

Nutrition per serving (1 slice): 135 calories, 3 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 24 g carbohydrates, 3 g protein

COLD CEREAL WITH HOT FRUIT

From Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook.

You'll love the combination of hot fruit with cereal and cold milk. Bananas, pears, apples and berries work well.

1 cup Life cereal
1/2 cup All-Bran cereal
1/4 cup low-fat granola
1/2 cup blueberries or other fruit
1 cup low-fat milk

In a microwaveable bowl, combine the cereal. Sprinkle with blueberries or other fruit of your choice. Heat in the microwave for 20 to 40 seconds, until the fruit is warm. Pour the cold milk over the top.

Nutrition per serving: 500 calories, 7 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 85 g carbohydrate, 20 g protein

BREAKFAST STRATA

A perfect dish to prepare for guests, this veggie-packed meatless strata is delicious.

1 to 2 tbsp olive oil

1 lb each of two vegetables or 2 lbs of any of the following vegetable combinations: bell peppers, onions, spinach and tomatoes; mushrooms and onions; corn and asparagus

12 eggs

1 quart low-fat milk

salt and pepper to taste

12 slices whole-wheat bread

12 oz reduced-fat cheddar cheese or jalapeño

cheddar cheese

Sauté the vegetables in olive oil. Whisk the eggs and milk. Season with salt and pepper as desired. Spray a 9-inch by 13-inch pan with non-stick cooking spray. Line the bottom with 6 slices of bread. Sprinkle with half the cheese. Pour 1 cup of the egg mixture on top. Repeat with bread, vegetables, cheese. Carefully pour the remaining egg mixture over the top. Press down with a spatula. Bake at 325 F about 50 minutes until set. Broil about 3 to 5 minutes until brown and puffy. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes.

Nutrition per serving: 270 calories, 9.5 g fat, 3.5 g saturated fat, 25 g carbohydrate, 21 g protein

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