

The 30 Pound Club

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Is Breakfast Important?

In a Message I wrote last week, I talked about a time-management expert who said that to get the brain functioning, a person should eat breakfast within 30 minutes of getting up. I questioned that because the rest of the interview I watched talked about people being effective at different times of the day. It raised several questions, so I think it's time to talk about breakfast.

What the Research Says

I've always said that one of the greatest of all the weight-loss myths is eating breakfast when you get up to jumpstart your metabolism. Fitness experts at all levels repeat it. Well, I stand by what I've said, especially after I just researched it again and found nothing further to support it. There are no studies—none—that I could find that say that your metabolism is boosted by eating breakfast when you first get up. However, that isn't the complete story.

While it might not jumpstart your metabolism, eating breakfast is a good idea, especially if you eat something substantial at home; you just don't have to eat it first thing in the morning. The problem with the studies is how they defined breakfast. Some studies defined it as 6 to 9 a.m. while others just defined it as sometime before lunch. Many people don't eat first thing in the morning, but they do eat something before lunch. That's what I do because I'm never hungry when I first get up.

I've written about the National Weight Loss Registry before, which tracks the habits of thousands of people who have lost weight and kept it off. Eating breakfast is one of those habits, but they don't clearly define when breakfast takes place. There's a big difference between eating upon rising at 5 a.m. and eating before leaving for work at 8 a.m.

So, to answer the question, is breakfast important? Yes. People who eat breakfast weight less, and it's one of the attributes of people who lose weight and maintain it.

What to Eat

There's no consistent research as to what the best breakfast should be. Studies have shown cereal, eggs, and bread products are all associated with less eating the rest of the day. However, without being cynical, some of the studies were sponsored by the dairy or cereal industry. The other problem is that most of the studies had fewer than 25 subjects; tough to base recommendations for a population on that few subjects.

What you should eat should probably be based on how you respond to foods. If lots of carbs put you to sleep an hour later, then you need to add some protein and reduce the carbohydrates; if carbs soothe your upset stomach, maybe they'll help you get through until lunch more comfortably, but add some protein for staying power. It doesn't have to be meat or eggs; there are cereals with a lot of protein and you can always add protein powder. Add some soluble fiber, too, just to make sure you get your quota.

When to Eat

As to when you should eat breakfast, it's really whenever you're comfortable eating it. For Paula, that's just about as soon as she opens her eyes. For me, it's about three to four hours later. Find out what works best for you and stick with it. It's one of the keys to energy and permanent weight loss.

One and Done.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

P.S. Tomorrow is National Wear Red Day® to promote heart disease awareness. Show your support by wearing your favorite red dress, shirt, or tie. February is also American Heart Health month and the Messages will be related to how you can take better care of your heart—male or female.

Straight Talk on Health

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