

For Better Living
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Overcoming Breakfast Barriers

You have often heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Many studies have shown that starting your day with breakfast offers many benefits. Eating breakfast is associated with a better attitude toward work or school, higher productivity and an improved ability to handle tasks that require memory. People who eat breakfast also tend to have more strength and endurance as well as better concentration and problem-solving ability. In contrast, people who skip breakfast are more likely to be tired, irritable and restless in the morning.

If breakfast is so important, why is it often skipped? The most common reasons include: "There isn't time," "Food that early makes me sick," "I don't like breakfast foods" and "I'm skipping breakfast to lose weight." Almost every excuse for not eating breakfast has a simple solution. For example:

Not enough time? Have quick-to-fix foods on hand, such as ready-to-eat breakfast cereal, instant oatmeal, bagels, English muffins, bread for toast, toaster waffles, fresh fruit, yogurt, juice or milk. Do as much preparation as possible the night before. Make a pitcher of juice and place dishes, utensils and non-perishable foods on the table. If you don't have time to sit down for breakfast, have easy, no-mess options readily available so that you can grab them as you walk out the door, like a banana, granola bar, a hard boiled egg or peanut butter and crackers.

Food that early doesn't set well with you, or you're not hungry in the morning? Start with something light, such as a glass of milk or fruit juice and lightly buttered toast or a small piece of fruit such as a banana. Later in the morning, when you feel more like eating, have a nutritious snack handy, such as a bagel, bran muffin, low-fat yogurt or homemade trail mix with nuts and dried fruit.

Don't like traditional breakfast food? No problem. Breakfast doesn't have to consist of cereal, toast and juice. Breakfast can be any food that sounds good. For example, try a slice of last night's cheese pizza, heated leftover rice with chopped apples, nuts and cinnamon, or a breakfast wrap with cut-up fresh fruit and low-fat cream cheese rolled in a whole-wheat tortilla.

Trying to control your weight? There is no evidence that eating breakfast leads to weight gain. In fact, just the opposite may be true. Skipping meals often leads to overeating during the day. In a research study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, researchers examined the effects of eating or skipping breakfast on calories eaten and burned throughout the day as well as circulating insulin, glucose and cholesterol levels in 10 healthy women of normal weight. Results indicated that when the women ate breakfast, they consumed approximately 100 fewer calories per day. Researchers also found that total and LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels were significantly lower in the women who ate breakfast. Furthermore, the women who ate breakfast had a better insulin response to eating, which suggests their risk of diabetes may be lower.

Your morning meal doesn't have to mean loading up on sugar, fat and cholesterol. Making

nutritious breakfast choices can set you up for healthier eating all day long.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension

Homemade Granola

Tip: Granola is a cereal-like combination of dried fruits, grains and nuts. Though it's a good source of protein and fiber, granola can also be high in fat and calories, especially the store-bought varieties. Watch your portion sizes or create your own granola to limit the amount of fat, calories and sugar in each serving.

1/4 cup slivered almonds
1/4 cup honey
1/4 cup unsweetened applesauce
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
2 cups dry old-fashioned oatmeal
2 cups bran flakes
3/4 cup dried apple pieces
1/2 cup golden raisins

Preheat the oven to 325 F. Lightly coat a baking sheet with cooking spray.

Spread the almonds on a baking sheet and bake about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Transfer immediately to a plate to cool. Raise the temperature of the oven to 350 F.

In a small bowl, whisk together the honey, applesauce, vanilla and cinnamon. Set aside.

In a large bowl, add the oatmeal and bran flakes. Stir to mix well. Add the honey mixture and toss with your hands. Don't break the clumps apart.

Spread the cereal mixture evenly onto a baking sheet. Place in the oven and, stirring occasionally, bake until golden brown, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool slightly.

In a large bowl, combine the cereal mixture, toasted almonds, apple pieces and raisins. Cool completely. Store in an airtight container.