

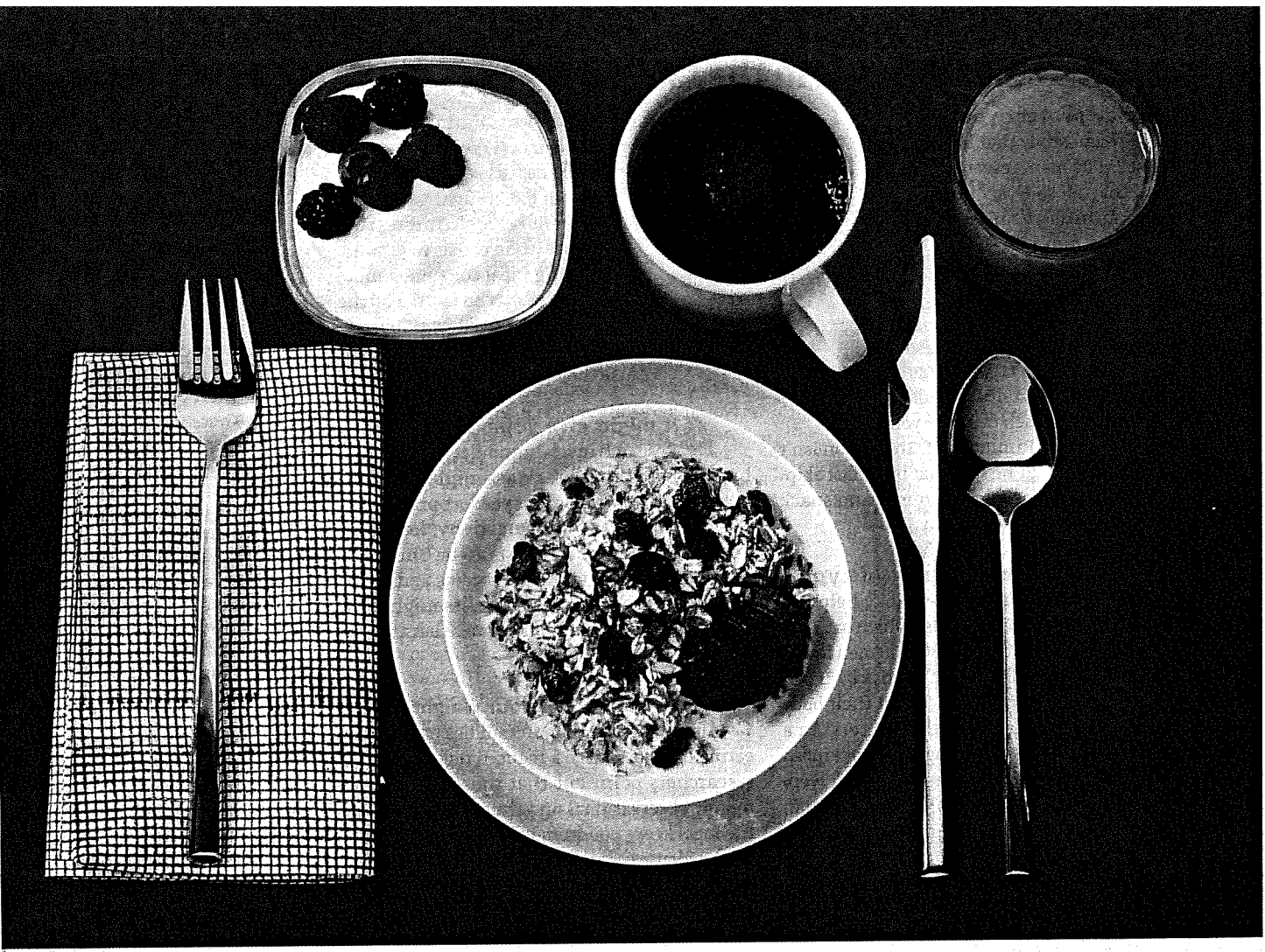
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## Breakfast matters

Our tests of cereals and Greek yogurt help you find the right morning meal

**R**OLL YOUR EYES if you like, but the old bromide about breakfast being the most important meal of the day is true (mostly). Breakfast eaters tend to have better diets overall, consuming more fruit, vegetables, milk, and whole grains than non-breakfast eaters. And because the time between dinner and the next morning's meal is the longest your body goes without food, breakfast has an effect on you that's different from any other meal. Eating within 2 hours of waking can make a difference in the way you metabolize glucose, or blood sugar, all day. Your glucose level rises every time you eat, and your pancreas produces insulin to shuttle the glucose into your cells, where it's used for energy. Research is finding that keeping glucose and insulin in the right balance has important effects on metabolism and health. (See "This Is Your Body on Breakfast," on page 16.)

"After a healthy breakfast your blood sugar increases a little bit, but it will take a while for your body to absorb it," says Eric Rimm, Sc.D., a professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston. "So you might not be hungry for lunch for 5 hours."

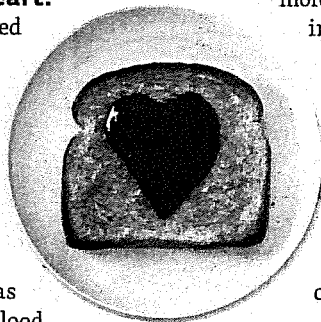
If you don't bother with breakfast, though, the prolonged fasting might lead to a bigger than normal boost in "hunger hormones" such as ghrelin, encouraging you to overeat at your next meal and leading to spikes and dips in glucose. "Over time, if your pancreas is constantly producing insulin to compensate for high levels of glucose, it will burn out and you'll develop diabetes," Rimm says.

What you eat is important, of course. If your idea of breakfast is a doughnut and a cup of coffee, or sugary cereal and a glass of fruit juice, you're setting the stage for metabolic havoc. Fortunately, breakfast can be flavorful as well as healthy. There are plenty of traditional breakfast foods that taste great and are good for you. Our food-testing team took a close look at 33 cereals and 27 Greek yogurts—two of the most popular breakfast items—to help you pick the most nutritious and best-tasting options. We sampled all of the products and crunched the nutrition numbers to determine which ones were winners and which ones were not so hot. No matter what your preference—something sweet and crunchy or smooth and creamy—there's a nutritious breakfast for you.

## 5 good reasons to eat in the morning

### 1 It may protect your heart.

In a recent study that involved almost 27,000 men, researchers found that those who didn't eat a morning meal were 27 percent more likely to develop heart disease than those who did. "Our research indicates that people who skip breakfast gain weight, which can lead to diabetes as well as high cholesterol and blood pressure—all of which can raise your risk of heart disease," Rimm notes. The reason isn't entirely known, but he says that breakfast skippers tend to overeat at other meals and snack excessively throughout the day.



more physically active during the morning than those who didn't. That might be because a temporary increase in blood sugar gave them more energy. It's interesting to note that those who ate a morning meal consumed more calories over the course of the day than the breakfast skippers—but they didn't gain weight because they were more active.

### 4 It might give you a mental edge.

Research involving adults and children has indicated that breakfast might enhance memory, attention, the speed of processing information, reasoning, creativity, learning, and verbal abilities. Scientists at the University of Milan in Italy reviewed 15 studies and found some evidence that those benefits might be a function of the stable glucose levels that a morning meal provides.

### 5 It just might keep your weight down.

Although more than 100 studies have linked eating breakfast with a reduced risk of obesity, researchers point out that those studies are merely observational and thus don't prove that the meal keeps you from gaining weight. More solid evidence comes from randomized controlled trials. One study of that type, published in the journal *Obesity*, found that overweight people who were dieting and ate more calories for breakfast than dinner lost more weight compared with subjects who ate larger evening meals. But other trials have been inconclusive. A study published in *AJCN* found that eating or skipping breakfast had no effect on weight loss, although it may have been too small to be meaningful.

### 2 It might lower your risk of type 2 diabetes.

A morning meal may help you avoid fluctuating glucose levels, which can lead to diabetes. A study of almost 30,000 men found that not eating breakfast raised the risk by 21 percent, even after taking into account their body mass, what they ate, and other factors. In a study of women, those under age 65 who skipped breakfast even just a few times per week were 28 percent more likely to develop diabetes than women who ate it regularly. And if you're in the habit of dashing out the door for work in the morning with only a cup of coffee, take note: Women in the study who worked full-time had a greater risk than those who worked part-time, the researchers noted, possibly because job stress has been found to raise glucose levels.

**3 It gets you moving.** In a recent study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (AJCN), people who ate breakfast were

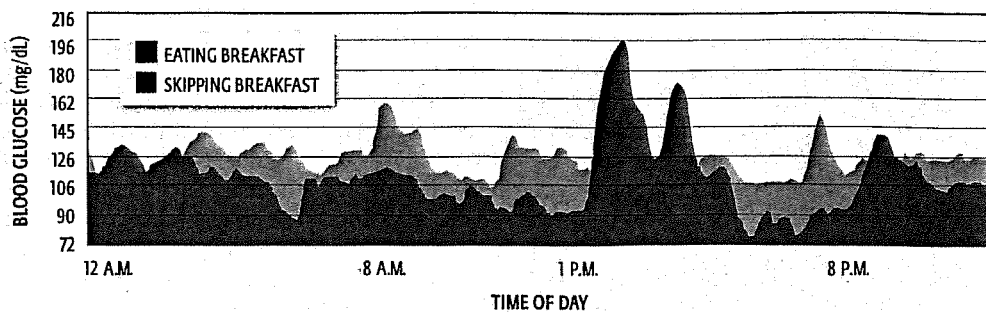
### Mix it up

There's no rule that breakfast has to consist of food specifically designated for that meal. In fact, last night's leftovers may be perfect. That's because most people consume about 50 to 60 percent of their total daily protein at dinner, and shifting those calories to the morning may have health benefits. In studies, eating protein at breakfast vs. lunch or dinner led to a greater feeling of fullness. Other research indicates that morning protein might encourage weight loss and increase muscle mass. Some good options: grilled chicken with vegetables, steak kebabs, or an egg-based casserole.

## This is your body on breakfast

Findings from a study called the Bath Breakfast Project at the University of Bath in the U.K. illustrate the effect that morning meals have on glucose balance. Researchers asked a group of subjects to eat 700 or more calories by 11 a.m. and another to fast until after noon. Both groups could eat whenever and whatever they wanted the rest of the day. Blood sugar was monitored every 5 minutes. Although the two groups ate similarly after noon, the breakfast skippers had bigger spikes and drops in glucose levels. The breakfast eaters improved their insulin

sensitivity—the body's response to rises in glucose—by 10 percent. "Eating breakfast seems to have a 'second-meal effect,' says James Betts, Ph.D., the lead researcher and a senior lecturer in nutrition and metabolism. "It primes your metabolism to maintain stable blood sugar levels after subsequent meals."



Source: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

# Get the most from your breakfast

Follow these tips for a healthier start to your day

**Front-load your calories.** Aim to consume 20 to 25 percent of your total daily calories at breakfast (up to 400 calories for women, up to 500 for men, and a bit more for vigorous exercisers). Research shows that it increases levels of the satiety hormone PYY, helping you to feel full, and may reduce the number of calories you consume at lunch, according to Heather Leidy, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the department of nutrition and exercise physiology at the University of Missouri, Columbia. It may also help you avoid overeating later in the day, which may lead to weight gain.

**Think protein.** The latest research suggests that eating protein first thing in the morning is key. Having 24 to 35 grams may help prevent weight gain and promote weight loss by stabilizing your blood sugar, decreasing your appetite, and making you feel full. Morning protein also helps limit high-fat evening snacking. A study in *AJCN* found that people who ate a protein-rich breakfast consumed 200 fewer calories at night.

**Time it right.** "In general, researchers agree that you should have a meal within 2 hours of getting up," says Rania Mekary, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences University in Boston. "If you eat later, you may be fasting too long."

**Pump up your cereal.** Ready-to-eat cereal on its own isn't the healthiest of

breakfasts. That's because it's primarily carbohydrates, with little fat or protein to help control blood sugar levels and keep you full. Milk adds protein, but not enough. Topping cereal with 1 cup (8 ounces) of Greek yogurt and a quarter-cup of almonds will supply 33 grams of protein. (Add fresh fruit for extra fiber and sweetness.) If only milk will do, supplement your cereal with an egg or a slice of whole-wheat toast with nut butter.

**Choose yogurt carefully.** All yogurts contain lactose, a naturally occurring sugar, but vanilla and fruit-based yogurts often contain added sugars. We tested 14 Greek vanilla yogurts and found that they had 6 to 21 grams of sugars. Those on the low end included Dannon Light & Fit Nonfat (7 grams), Yoplait 100 Fat Free (7 grams), and Activia Light Fat Free (6 grams). One way to keep the sugar down is to choose a plain variety, then add a tiny amount of vanilla extract and honey, or top with fruit.

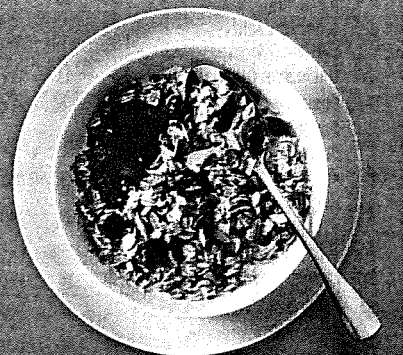
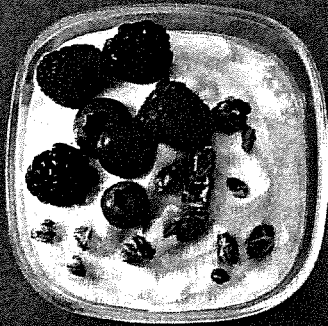
**Don't be afraid of eggs.** True, eggs are high in dietary cholesterol, but their effect on your blood cholesterol level is minimal. Most people can eat several eggs per week without worry. They're an ideal breakfast food for people watching their weight. In a study in the *International Journal of Obesity* that was funded by the American Egg Board, people on a low-fat diet who ate eggs lost more weight than those who ate a bagel. And eggs have been found to reduce levels of the hunger-stimulating hormone ghrelin and to increase levels of PYY3-36, a hormone associated with satiety.

**Go easy on the fruit juice.**

A small glass each day—4 ounces or a half-cup—is fine, but don't overpour. Choose whole fruit instead, which has less sugar and more fiber, and is more filling.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A YOGURT

- 20 grams or less of sugar per serving
- those that supply at least 15 percent of the daily value of calcium (yogurt is an excellent source)
- if fat intake is a concern, low- or nonfat products when possible



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CEREAL

- few ingredients
- 5 grams or more of fiber
- no more than 3 grams of fat
- no more than 8 grams of sugar
- no more than 140 milligrams of sodium

## THE LOWDOWN ON EGG SANDWICHES

Breakfast sandwiches are among the most popular a.m. foods. But our recent tests of frozen egg-and-meat varieties suggest that even the healthy-sounding ones don't have much going for them in the nutrition or taste departments. They supply a hefty amount of protein, but like many other processed foods, they tend to be packed with sodium, low in fiber, and high in fat. The ones we looked at were healthier than comparable options at drive-thrus. McDonald's Sausage McMuffin, for instance, has 370 calories, 23 grams of fat, and 780 milligrams of sodium. Burger King's Sausage, Egg & Cheese Muffin Sandwich has 430 calories, 26 grams of fat, and 1,140 milligrams of sodium. Here are a few you might try in a pinch:



**Kellogg's Special K Flatbread Breakfast Sandwich, Sausage, Egg & Cheese**

240 calories, 11 grams of fat, 820 milligrams of sodium  
Nutrition: ○ Taste: ●



**Jimmy Dean Delights English Muffin Turkey Sausage, Egg White & Cheese**

250 calories, 8 grams of fat, 650 milligrams of sodium  
Nutrition: ○ Taste: ○



**Lean Cuisine Turkey Sausage English Muffin**

220 calories, 5 grams of fat, 680 milligrams of sodium  
Nutrition: ○ Taste: ○



**Weight Watchers Smart Ones English Muffin Sandwich Turkey Sausage**

230 calories, 8 grams of fat, 490 milligrams of sodium  
Nutrition: ○ Taste: ○

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor