

## **Breakfast – An Investment in Good Health**

By Debbie Richardson, MA, RD / Optimal Nutrition

[www.optimalnutrition4U.com](http://www.optimalnutrition4U.com)

Gone are the days of June Cleaver effortlessly whipping up breakfast so the entire family can sit down together to enjoy the first meal of the day. However, scientific research shows the importance of breakfast for everyone's health at any age. With the school year just beginning, it is also critical that children have breakfast to help them stay focused at school. A study in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that those who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight than non-breakfast eaters. Eating that first meal of the day increases the likelihood of meeting your body's need for essential vitamins and minerals. Starting the day with a healthful meal can help control appetite later in the day and will likely lead to healthier food choices overall. No matter how busy your schedule, there are easy ways to make sure everyone has a great start to their day. Here are some things to consider when preparing breakfast:

1. **Include Lean Protein** – Many breakfasts include refined carbohydrates (e.g., doughnuts, Poptarts, sugary cereals, etc.), which are fast digesting processed sugars and enriched flour. Most likely you'll be hungry again in 2 hours. Protein is digested at a slower rate than refined carbohydrates. It will keep blood sugar levels steady and help you feel satisfied longer. Consider eating low-fat, reduced-sugar yogurt, eggs (hard-boiled, scrambled in nonfat spray or microwaved, or poached), skim or 1% milk, soy or turkey sausage, low fat cheese sticks, peanut butter, or a small handful of nuts.
2. **Fill Up with Fiber** – Add a serving of a fiber-rich carbohydrate to the protein and you've got guaranteed satisfaction. Choose whole grain breads and cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. To add even more fiber, add a serving of fresh fruit. Eating a whole fruit rather than drinking fruit juice increases satisfaction. It takes longer to digest due to the fiber and takes longer to eat which can give you psychological satisfaction. Remember, fiber also helps lower the "bad" cholesterol too! Besides whole grain breads and cereals, consider whole wheat toaster waffles topped with peanut butter and all-fruit jam, plain oatmeal sweetened with all-fruit jam or dried fruit, whole grain English muffins, tortillas or bagels.
3. **Front-Load Your Day with Nutrients** – People who eat breakfast usually have higher overall intakes of vitamin B6, folic acid, vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium and fiber, which are nutrients that help protect against heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis and many other diseases. A simple breakfast of an orange, a cup of skim milk (or a 12-oz. skim latte), and a whole wheat English muffin spread with a tablespoon of peanut butter gives you a head start towards the daily nutrient recommendations.
4. **Include Your Favorite Tastes** – Let's say your breakfast choices haven't been the most nutritious. Even small changes can make a big difference in the nutritional value of the meal. Some like a sweeter taste in the morning. Instead of sugary pastries, try a piece of toasted whole grain bread spread with a nut butter and all-fruit preserves. Don't have time to prepare eggs? Make hard-boiled eggs ahead of time and keep in the refrigerator to add to a grab 'n go breakfast. Or, while toasting a slice of whole grain bread, microwave a scrambled egg, add a low fat slice of cheese for a hearty egg sandwich.

Other ideas for to include in your quick and healthy breakfasts:

- Lean turkey breast or ham slices wrapped around a low fat cheese stick.

- Melt low fat cheese on a whole wheat tortilla. Add some veggies to boost the nutrient value.
- Add whole grain cereal to low fat/reduced sugar yogurt and top with fresh berries.
- Add all-fruit preserves to plain yogurt and top with 1-2 tablespoons of your favorite nuts.
- Spread your favorite nut butter on a whole wheat tortilla, add sliced apples, bananas or pears for a tasty burrito.
- Make fruit smoothies the night before so they are ready to serve in the morning.
- Don't be afraid to step outside the breakfast "box" and offer:
  - ◆ Baby carrots or celery dipped in peanut butter with dried fruit on the side.
  - ◆ Leftover cheese pizza or macaroni and cheese with fruit.
  - ◆ Ham and cheese on whole grain bread with a serving of fruit.
  - ◆ Whole wheat crackers, low fat cheese and fruit.

Getting a tasty, quick and healthy breakfast doesn't have to be difficult. Keep a variety of whole foods on hand, including fruits (dried, fresh, or frozen), nuts and nut butters, sliced veggies, whole grain bread products, all-fruit spreads, lean meat options and low fat dairy products. That way, you'll have many options for a healthy breakfast for anyone in your family.