

Breakfast—Don't Break It

Kelly, came to see me.

Why eat breakfast?

Body's response to breakfast

Benefits of eating breakfast

What is heart-healthy breakfast?

Breakfast choices

One day, Kelly, a young high school senior, with heart palpitations, came to my office with her mom.

“Hi, I am Dr. Nikam. How can I help you?” I said

“For the past few days while at school, I have noticed my heart fluttering along with dizziness and weakness.

“Did you ever pass out?”

“No.”

“Do you ever get chest pains?”

“Sometimes I have heaviness in the left side of my chest. It feels uncomfortable.”

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“Do you play any sport?” I quizzed

“That’s the thing I cannot understand,” Her mom interjected, “In the afternoons when she is active in athletics, gymnastics, and cheerleading she is fine,” said

“That’s a lot of exercise,” I sighed

“Do you get the same symptoms when you are actively involved in your activities?”

“No”

“Honey, sometimes you have complained of a chest pain when you were running.” her mother interjected again.

“Mom! That was when I was pushing myself too hard. Not anymore.”

“Kelly, do you eat breakfast?” I continued.

“Well, in the mornings, I’m not hungry.”

“Do you eat breakfast?” I repeated

“You see, I am always in a hurry, I don’t have time.”

“If you were not in a hurry, would you eat breakfast?”

“Well, thinking about it, I probably would not.”

“Why not?” I said.

“ ‘Cause, I never eat breakfast.”

“What if someone offers you breakfast?”

“If I’m not in a mood— h____, NO.” She said.

“That’s all the questions I have for you.” I concluded, “Now let me go ahead and check your heart.”

I did a complete cardiac work up on Kelly: Physical examination, EKG, Echocardiogram, and a 24 hour heart monitor, along with the thyroid, blood sugar, and other blood tests. Everything came out satisfactory, except for one test. At the end of a three-hour glucose tolerance test, her blood sugar level was 61 mg. When someone’s blood sugar level drops below 80 mg, they are known to have hypoglycemia-- low blood sugar. Kelly’s case illustrates the significance of eating breakfast to maintain a steady blood sugar level needed for optimal performance.

Why Eat Breakfast?

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The maximum demands of the day are placed on your body during the early morning hours. That is when you need to have, a readily available, balanced energy source. Proper hydration is equally important, which I will address later, in the “Drinks” chapter. In the morning hours, both, children and adults have shown better concentrate, performance, and muscle coordination if their energy levels are optimal

After we fast for 10-12 hours during the night, our blood glucose levels are generally low in the early morning hours. Hence, the term breakfast was use to break this low blood sugar level or energy level. To meet the extra demands placed on your body by activities-- walking, talking, showering, *cursing*, and rushing to work or school-- your body needs a fresh supply of energy. During the night your body, primarily, depends on fat for a constant energy source. However, critical learning, coordination, and physical activities require a steadily available source of glucose that is much easier for the muscle and brain tissues to utilize than fatty acids. In addition to glucose, you also need other macro and micronutrients in the morning, which I will discuss shortly in this chapter.

Benefits of eating breakfast

Let us look at the benefits of having breakfast on a regular basis, including holidays and weekends.

Breakfast provides a fresh supply of energy, for increased metabolic demands for during the early hours of the morning.

It improves learning.

It increases your ability to focus.

It improves muscle coordination.

It supplies calories, protein, fat, and essential nutrients.

It also provides vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

It helps to evenly distribute your calories throughout your day.

It reduces midmorning crave for snacks or high carbohydrate foods.

People who eat breakfast have less irritable than those who skip breakfast.

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It reduces the need for snacks or carbohydrate binges between your meals.

Avoid using the lame excuse that you do not have time for breakfast. If you have the time to get sick, skip school or work, in order to see a cardiologist for heart palpitations, dizziness, and weakness, you do have the time for a heart-healthy breakfast. It takes less than five minutes to eat your breakfast, and it takes less than thirty seconds to drink a glass of skim milk. Let me not hear, that you are too busy! Are you a nuclear physicist trying to prevent a nuclear holocaust? Even if you were a nuclear physicist, I would still emphasize the same point affirmatively because I do not want you to press the wrong button, blasting away my warm, little, cozy hometown. Personally, I would like to live for a long time.

I could just imagine the nuclear physicist (assuming that he survived the nuclear holocaust he created.) sitting in the witness stand, in front of other survivors of the nuclear blast, and defending himself.

“Your honor, I was given improper advise about the need for breakfast during critical activities.” He would continue, “My blood sugar level must have been very, very low when I pressed the green button thinking that it was the red button. As my expert nuclear responsiveness was clouded by hypoglycemia, I was unable to provide maximum concentration. I plead not guilty. Instead, your honor, I plead insanity on the basis of hypoglycemia cause by improper advice on the importance of eating breakfast. You have to excuse me, your honor. Now, it is time to eat my breakfast.”

Everyone's blood sugar may not drop to level that we saw in Kelly's case, after several hours of fasting. In fact, some people, who have fasted from six to ninety days, have done so without significant adverse affects. Each individual's metabolism is different. A small percentage of people may not have noticeable cardiovascular symptoms related to hypoglycemia. On the other hand, dehydration, stress, or anxiety can precipitate symptoms of weakness, dizziness, and lack of energy in the absence of hypoglycemia. These factors underscore the importance of proper hydration, control of stress, or anxiety during challenging hours of your day.

When one faces a severe stressful situation, the body responds by releasing adrenaline that increases blood glucose level by breaking

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down glycogen to glucose and by converting amino acids to glucose for immediate energy. Adrenaline also causes significant symptoms of palpitations, weakness, dizziness, or flushing.

The key to avoid adrenaline surges and its symptoms is to maintain proper hydration, learn stress coping skills, and eat your *breakfast*.

What type of breakfast is heart-healthy?

Skim milk: The best breakfast in any town (if you are on the run). It is an excellent source of protein and low glycemic index carbohydrates. One carton (8 ounces of milk) has 8 grams of protein, 10-11 grams of carbs, zero fat, calcium, and 80 calories. Look for calcium fortified skim milk that provides additional calcium. If you do not like to drink plain skim milk, consider making your coffee or tea using skim milk. You get three for the price of one— coffee, fluid, and milk.

Milk (8 Ounces)	Pro	Carbs	Fat	Fat Cal	Total Cal
Skim Milk					
1% Fat milk					
2% Fat milk					
Whole milk					

Sugar: Substitute your table sugar with a sweetener— *Equal* or *Splenda*—and further reduce your carbohydrate intake. I have seen, in doctors' dining rooms, some of my friends putting 3-4 packets of pure sugar in their drinks, in addition to 3-6 cups of *Half & Half*— bless their hearts!

Juices: Fresh fruits are preferred choice over fruit juices. Fruits contain mineral, fibers, enzymes, and vitamins. They also do not have the preservatives or extra sugar added for taste. Remember, fruits or fruits juices contain carbohydrates and add calories to your diet.

Egg: It is an excellent source of readily digestible protein. (Albumin). However, it contains 274 mgs of cholesterol in addition to fat. American Heart Association recommends no more than 300 mgs of

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cholesterol per day. If you eat a three-whole-egg breakfast, then you got more than 800 mg of cholesterol— that too, at the crack of dawn. Protein is good; 800 mg of cholesterol is not. You have a few choices. You can use an egg substitute that has no cholesterol. It comes as a yellow liquid in cartons. You can use that to make omelets or scrambled eggs. The second option is to use egg white and discard the yolk. My friends think I am crazy to throw away the best part of the egg. Well! They have a point when it comes to taste and texture. However, they will not be there to cheer you up when the same cholesterol clogs up your arteries. A three-egg-white omelet can provide you ten grams of protein and zero cholesterol! You also can prepare your egg-white omelets in a microwave. Pour two or three eggs whites on a flat plate and cook them in a microwave for 45 to 75 seconds. You get a nice fluffy egg white omelet. You can add your favorite spices, salt, onions, bell pepper, soybean sausage, or other ingredients to make it more palatable.

Sausage and Beacon: Even though these breakfast items are favored in certain diets, they contain a high percentage of saturated fat. For example, a sausage patty contains 12 g of fat of which ___ g are saturated. There are substitute items that are considerably less in total and saturated fats. You could also consider low-fat turkey sausage or beacon over the regular ones.

Cereals: Contrary to the conventional wisdom, that cereals are good—not all cereals are created equal. There are a lot of bad cereals and a few good ones. Putting a celebrity picture on a box does not make a cereal heart-healthy.

If you carefully read the labels on the cereals, you will realize that most of them have 25-30 grams of high glycemic index carbohydrates. Some of them have visible sugar or sugar icing on them to entice you the consumer.

I can understand the marketing gimmick used by advertising agencies to allure working mothers to reach out for a quick-fix cereal breakfast get the kid on the road again. However, a reality check should begin at home and with working mothers. Remember, that you your option are limited by the choices that pack your refrigerator shelves. Therefore, if you fathers and mothers cultivate a heart-healthy habit it is bound to spill over to your next generation by gravity and by the choices that you limit in your refrigerator.

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Cereals, heavily promoted as crispy, tasty, or zesty, are loaded with sugar and high glycemic index carbohydrates. Nevertheless, it is your mission to select 20-30 g carbohydrates for breakfast from the low glycemic index list that maintains your blood glucose levels over a longer period. Due to pressure from the consumer industry, more recently, the cereal manufacturers are slowly responding by bringing more heart-healthy cereals—Fiber One, All Bran, Kashi, all of which are have less carbohydrates, more fiber, and even cholesterol reducing properties. These cereals are a welcome to someone concerned with heart-healthy lifestyle. Make sure, you use skim milk with your cereals so that you can further reduce your fat intake.

Hydration: Hydration is very important after fasting for 10-12 hours, as your body would have lost of most free water in urine and insensible losses. Hence, hydration should be an essential part of your breakfast regimen. I recommend Metamucil to all my cardiac patients. It helps to hold water in the body for several hours, in addition to its cholesterol lowering properties. I take it personally. Take one tablespoon of Metamucil along with two to three glasses of water.

Then use another glass of water for your vitamins, aspirin, fish oil, and flaxseed capsules, etc. Add to that a glass of skim milk in your coffee or tea. Now, even before you leave your house, you are well hydrated with four to five glasses of fluids.

Once you are well hydrated, you are less likely to drop your blood pressure or feel dizzy when there is a sudden adrenaline surge, leading to dilation of the blood vessels. It may also minimize palpitations, weakness, and sickness in your stomach.

Restaurant breakfast tips: Fast food restaurants are not interested in calories, carbohydrates, or fat content. It is up to you to choose food items that are likely to promote a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Look at this sample breakfast menu from a fast food restaurant:

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“Looks and tastes great,” you may say.

Pancakes, hash browns, are loaded with high glycemic index carbohydrates. An omelet made from three whole-eggs has more than 800 mg of cholesterol. Do not let the looks deceive you. This breakfast is a mixture of saturated fat, cholesterol, carbohydrates, and no fiber

“There are not too many choices, ” A common complaint that I hear from people whose lives revolve around restaurant menus.

You do not need too many choices. The problem is, you deliberately select the wrong choices based on impulse, peer pressure, taste or, path of least resistance.

Look for skim milk, eggbeaters, high fiber cereals, fresh fruits, simulated bacon, sweeteners, or plain water. These choices should be enough to get you through the morning.

When you are cruising across a breakfast table, remember its not how much you are paying for the buffet (Yes! you, including I want to get the most for our bucks), but how much you have to pay to unclog your heart arteries in the future, how much grief and loss of work you have to endure.

BREAKFAST CHOICES

Here is partial list of the heart-healthy breakfast items that you could consider:

Skim milk

Egg White or substitutes

Simulated bacon or sausage

Vegetable or Turkey sausage

High fiber cereals such as Fiber One, Allbran, Kashi, etc.

Small pain beagle

Benecol in place of margarine

Fresh fruits in place of sweetened juices

Coffee or tea

Sweetener in place of sugar

Fiber-rich, low-calorie, and protein-rich whole wheat bread

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Soy sausage links and patties
Non-fat yogurt
Fat free cottage cheese
One pancake with minimal syrup
Low-fat Canadian Beacon

Cooking tips: We routinely cook egg white or egg substitute in a microwave. Place the egg white in a cereal bowl and cook it in microwave for 60-90 seconds. It will result in a nice fluffy blend. You also can add spices, onion, and bell pepper for taste.

Cook a beagle in a toaster Owen and add benecol, a plant sterol and stenol that lowers blood cholesterol levels.

Consider adding a tablespoon of flaxseeds to your cold cereal that increases your Omega-3 intake.

Make you coffee or tea using skim milk so you do not need to add Half & Half to that.

Select high fiber, low-calorie, and high protein whole wheat bread in place of white bread.

Avoid cereals rich in high glycemic index carbohydrates.

Avoid croissants (300 calories) or muffins (400 calories) that are high in carbohydrates, fats, and calories.

Nik's burrito:

If you can prepare Nik's burritos using just plain egg white or egg substitute which can provide you very nutritious breakfast with out the extra cholesterol that you get with regular eggs.

You need the following ingredients:

Chopped onions

Chopped bell pepper

Can of unsalted mushrooms

One- two teaspoons of olive oil

Two cartons of eggbeaters

Two soybean sausages patties

Salt, pepper, or your favorite choice of spices

One diced tomato & fiber rich tortillas

Put three teaspoons of oil over a medium sized pan. Mix all the chopped ingredients including onions, bell pepper, mushrooms, and let

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them cook for three the five minutes. Add the egg, crumbled sausage patties, which have been cooked in the microwave for at least forty-five seconds to a minute on both each sides into the pan. Stir the mixture until the eggbeaters are dry and scrambled.

Cook the soil sausage patties in the microwave for forty-five seconds on each side. Then cut them into small cubes about the same size as the onion chops. In the mean time put a small high fiber tortilla in a toaster oven. Now you can take a small portion of the scramble egg mixture and wrap it with the tortilla to create Nik's burrito. You can put the remaining scramble egg mixture in to small zip-lock bags and put them in the freezer for future use.

As you can see I have carefully researched all the items that are available in the breakfast section of a supper market and selected those items that are rich in proteins, low in carbohydrates, low in fat, and cholesterol and high in fiber content. I have also taken into count the minerals and the micronutrients that you can get from fresh fruits and vegetables.