The Importance of Breakfast for Nourishment and Function

Breakfast is often thought of as the most important meal of the day. And here is why!

**Aids in a healthy diet.** Eating breakfast each morning helps us get the nutrients we need for the day in order to have a positive effect on our health. That is if we eat a breakfast that includes most of the foods groups, such as fruit or juice, bread or cereal, milk or yogurt, and eggs or peanut butter.

**Provides our body with energy.** As we sleep, our metabolism slows down, only providing our brain, lungs, and heart with energy. Once we wake, more energy is required for the rest of our body to function, such as our muscles to move around. A nutritious breakfast in the morning is important to provide the energy our body needs to function better, and that would include protein foods and those that provide fiber. That is why children are offered breakfast in day care and schools—it helps them to be more alert to learn their lessons, to play, and to grow. We need breakfast for the same reasons, well maybe not to grow so much!

**Helps us stay alert and impacts our mood.** The foods we eat in the morning can help us feel alert and focused throughout the day and can even put us in a better mood. This is not a donut and coffee or foods high in added sugars which may provide a short burst of energy as it doesn’t last long compared to eating protein foods and those with fiber. See the next page for good sources of fiber and protein.

**Helps with satiety and controls bowels.** So whole grain foods that contain fiber and protein can provide us with longer lasting energy and help us feel full longer. This makes us less hungry at lunch time, at least not to be “starving.” Foods with fiber can also help our bowels form good stools to be able to go regularly along with adequate beverages to drink.

**Some background about energy and our metabolism.** Our bodies run at a certain speed during the day or night, requiring a source of energy or fuel like a car. How fast the body runs, also called our “metabolism” depends on our body size, our age, how much muscle we have and the amount of physical activity. The amount of energy required to run our bodies is measured in “calories.” This could be 1600 calories or 3000 calories a day.

The food and drinks we consume provides energy (or calories) from carbohydrates (sugars and starches), proteins, and fats. The food label tells us that a gram (there are 28 grams in an ounce) of carbs and protein provides four calories of energy. A gram of fat, nine calories. The trick to maintain weight is to eat about the same amount of calories every day that your body needs to function. When you eat less, you will lose weight as your body will use the fat and protein in your body for energy. When you eat more, and you will gain weight as the body stores the extra energy as fat.
**Good fiber sources for breakfast**

- Whole wheat bread: 1 = 2 grams
- Oatmeal: 1 cup = 5 grams
- Bran flakes: 3/4 cup = 5.5 grams
- Cheerios: 1 cup = 3 grams
- Shredded Wheat, spoon size: 1/2 cup = 3 grams
- Apples with skin: 1 = 4.5 grams
- Pears: 1 = 5.5 grams
- Raspberries: 1 cup = 8 grams

**Sarcopenia** is the loss of muscle and muscle weakness that comes as we age. Most people begin to lose muscle mass after they turn 30. The effects of sarcopenia include:

⇒ A decrease in our strength, mobility, and activity level.
⇒ An increased incidence of falls and weakened bones that are more likely to break.

A protein rich breakfast and incorporating protein foods into our meals is important in maintaining our muscle mass and strength. Being active and exercising is another way to help slow down muscle loss and weakness. Our body needs about 20 grams of protein each meal to build and maintain muscle mass.

Try to build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity endurance activity on most or all days of the week. This includes walking very brisk (4 mph), cleaning heavy (washing windows, vacuuming, mopping), mowing lawn (power mower), bicycling light effort (10-12 mph), badminton recreational, and tennis doubles. However, any movement you do is better than just sitting still.

**Common protein sources with amounts:**

- Meat, poultry, fish, and cheese: 3 oz. = 21 grams
- Eggs: 1 = 7 grams
- Peanut butter: 2 tbsp. = 7 grams
- Beans and lentils: 1/2 cup = 7 grams
- Milk: 1 cup = 8 grams
- Nuts and seeds: 1 oz. = 7 grams
- Greek yogurt: 6 oz. = 12 grams
- Regular yogurt: 1/2 cup = 6 grams
- Cottage cheese: 1/4 cup = 7 grams
Egg and Cheese English Muffin

Ingredients:
- 1 large egg
- 1 slice of 2% fat cheese
- 1 whole-wheat English muffin

Directions:
1. Whisk the egg in a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Microwave the egg on high for about 45-55 seconds or pan fry the egg.
3. Place the cooked egg on a slice of whole-wheat English muffin and top with the slice of cheese.
4. Top with the other half of the whole-wheat English muffin and enjoy with a side of fresh fruit.

Creamy Oatmeal

Ingredients:
- ½ of old-fashioned oats or quick oats
- 1 cup of low-fat milk

Directions:
1. Pour the ½ cup of oats into a microwave safe bowl, then pour the 1 cup of reduced fat milk in and stir.
2. Microwave on high for 2 ½ - 3 minutes or until desired thickness.
3. For a sweeter taste, add fresh fruit, raisins, or vanilla extract. For extra healthy fat and protein, add chopped walnuts and/or chia seeds or ground flaxseeds.

Greek Yogurt with Fruit and Nuts

Ingredients:
- 3/4 cup of nonfat Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup of fresh fruit (blueberries, strawberries, banana, or peaches)
- 1 tbsp. of crushed walnuts, almonds, or pecans (optional)

Directions:
1. Place yogurt in a bowl.
2. Top with desired fresh fruit and nuts.

Sample Breakfast Menus

⇒ 1 cup of low-fat milk
   Egg and Cheese on Whole-Wheat English Muffin (follow the recipe above)
   1 cup of Strawberries

⇒ 1 cup of Orange Juice
   ½ cup of Oatmeal (follow the recipe above)
   1/4 cup of cottage cheese

⇒ 1 cup of Coffee
   3/4 cup of Greek yogurt (follow recipe above)
   1 slice of whole wheat toast w/ peanut butter

⇒ 1 cup of low-fat milk
   1 hard boiled egg
   1 slice of whole wheat toast
   1 cup of desired fresh fruit
**Breakfast Puzzle**

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- METABOLISM
- BREAKFAST
- WHEAT
- OATMEAL
- PROTEIN
- BRAIN
- FRUIT
- FIBER
- EGG
- ENERGY
- MILK

For other tips and resources visit:
- [www.ncoa.org - Senior Nutrition](http://www.ncoa.org)
- [www.nutrition.gov - Older Individuals](http://www.nutrition.gov)

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**Do you have questions or concerns about what to eat?**

If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

**Check out our website for nutrition resources:**
- [http://cceschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors](http://cceschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors)

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**Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments.**

For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext. 304

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Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).

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