

Breakfast Is Served, With a Side of Health Benefits

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Would you like to ward off weight gain, prevent heart disease, stay sharp and feel energetic? Try eating breakfast. You've heard it a thousand times: Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. While all meals are important for good nutrition, breakfast offers a unique opportunity to start your day off right.

Breakfast Helps Beat the Bulge. The morning meal may provide an edge in keeping excess pounds at bay, making it especially important as you age and your metabolism slows. In fact, several studies suggest that eating early in the day results in fewer calories eaten during the remaining hours. Of course, what you eat matters.

If you've banished eggs from your breakfast menu, you may want to reconsider. In a recent Louisiana State University study, overweight women who ate two eggs for breakfast at least five times a week for two months took in 300 fewer calories the rest of the day, on average, compared to those who noshed on a bagel breakfast of the same caloric value. The egg group lost 65% more weight, reduced waist measurements by 83% more and reported feeling more energetic than the bagel eaters.

What about the effects of so many eggs on heart disease risk? At the end of the study, women in both groups had similar blood lipid levels, including total cholesterol, high-density lipoproteins (HDL, the "good" cholesterol), low-density lipoproteins (LDL, the "bad" cholesterol) and triglycerides.

There is a caveat, however, for people with diabetes. In a study of nearly 118,000 people, those with diabetes who ate one egg or more a day did have a higher risk of heart disease.

But eggs aren't the only breakfast food that can whittle your waistline. Women who eat a bowl of cereal are less likely to be overweight than women who eat something else or forgo breakfast altogether.

Benefits for Hearts and Minds. Simply eating a morning meal also fosters clean arteries, benefiting the heart and brain. Research from the University of Nottingham in England found that skipping breakfast for two weeks led to higher blood levels of insulin and artery-clogging LDL-cholesterol versus two weeks of eating breakfast.

Unobstructed blood vessels allow oxygen-rich blood to reach tissues and to supply the brain with the glucose it needs for cognitive prowess. Forgoing breakfast can mean a foggier mental start to your day that can affect alertness, reasoning and memory all day long.

Breakfast Egg Wrap Adapted with permission from the American Egg Board.

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons water

Whole-wheat tortilla (8-inch diameter)

¼ cup diced red bell pepper or cooked broccoli, asparagus or mushrooms

1. In small bowl, beat together eggs and water.

2. Coat a 7-to 10-inch omelet pan with vegetable cooking spray; heat over medium-high heat. When hot, pour in egg mixture.

3. Tilt pan to move the egg around until it all reaches the hot pan. When no visible liquid egg remains, sprinkle top with vegetables.

4. Place tortilla on plate. Carefully slide egg onto it. Roll and enjoy with salsa, if desired.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 227 calories, 21 grams protein, 12 grams carbohydrate, 13 grams fat, 6 grams fiber, 560 milligrams sodium, 423 milligrams cholesterol.

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