



This Is What a **Perfect**
Breakfast Looks Like...

*Do questions of what, when, and why to eat in the morning
have you feeling scrambled? Here's an end to the confusion
so you can start every day sunny-side up.*

BY MARYGRACE TAYLOR | PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP FICKS

Breakfast has a reputation as the most important meal of the day, yet it's also the one we're all most likely to skip. Completely contradictory, right? Part of the dichotomy has to do with our penchant for eating on the go. (Ever have a meal while talking on the phone *and* working on your laptop? Yeah, we thought so.) But there's another major reason so many of us forgo the morning meal: sheer confusion. Over the past decade, we've been barraged with endless contradictory drivel on what and when—and even whether—the meal should be, making breakfast too irksome to even think about, let alone eat.

Well, it's time to stop the morning madness: We've pored over the recent research and asked top nutritionists what we really need to know about breakfast. So grab some coffee, free your toaster from storage, and get ready to break some eggs. Here's the striking truth about your morning meal.

YES, YOU NEED IT. Nutritionists have been going on for years about how eating breakfast helps stabilize blood sugar, revs metabolism, and can prevent you from devouring a whole box of cookies before lunch. But last year, the idea of “breakfast for weight loss” was seriously slammed after two *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* studies suggested that the meal has no effect on waist size. One study found that, because they were more

energized and active, breakfast eaters torched nearly 500 more calories than non-breakfast eaters. But—and it's a big *but*—they also consumed 500 more calories daily by eating breakfast in the first place, negating the effect. Another 4-month study yielded similar findings: Neither eating breakfast nor skipping it had any impact on people's weight, leading the study authors to conclude that breakfast was a matter of choice,

Eating breakfast curbs cravings throughout the day, lasting up to and after dinner.

not necessary, for fat loss.

But those two studies don't overturn reams of earlier research showing that the morning meal—regardless of its effect on weight loss—hones cognitive performance, supplies extra energy for exercise (no matter what time of day you work out), and can help stave off type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and even heart disease.

And if weight loss is your goal? Breakfast will probably help with that, too. A brand-new study in the *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* revealed that when people breakfasted on oatmeal instead of consuming its caloric equivalent in sugared cornflakes or skipping the meal altogether, they took in 31% fewer calories at their next meal. What's more, there's tons of conclusive

evidence proving that breakfast does indeed control blood sugar — meaning if you eat it, you won't be tempted to scarf down those cookies, not just a few hours later but after dinner, too, when cravings can be intense.

Bottom line: If you think you're doing just fine, thank you, without breakfast,

“If weight loss is your goal? Eating this way will probably help you with that, too.”

try an experiment. “I have clients who never ate breakfast and never had a problem with hunger or cravings,” says Erica Giovino, a registered dietitian in Los Angeles. “But once they started eating it, they felt more aware and alert” — in a word, healthier. You undoubtedly will, too.

YOU SHOULD EAT MORE THAN YOU THINK. No, you can't just nibble on a banana and call it a meal. A banana has about 100 calories — and that's not enough to correct low blood sugar and keep vicious cravings from haunting you later in the day. Your breakfast should be about the same size, calorically, as your lunch or dinner, according to Keri Gans, a registered dietitian and the author of *The Small Change Diet*. For the average active woman in her 40s or 50s, that means around 400 calories for breakfast, 400 for lunch, 500 for dinner, as well as another 300 total for snacks, treats, and a glass of wine.

PERFECT BREAKFAST = SIMPLE FORMULA. You've heard it before: Every meal should be a happy combo of high-fiber carbs, lean protein, and healthy fats. Here's exactly how that breaks down in the morning:

- **Make half your breakfast high-fiber carbs** like 2 slices of sprouted-grain toast and a medium orange, ½ cup of oatmeal with a sliced banana, 1 small sweet potato with ½ cup of beans, or a smoothie made with a banana and 1 cup each of chopped kale and chopped strawberries. Fiber is superfilling and provides long-lasting energy. Aim for about 50 g of fiber-rich carbs, suggests Gans.
- **Add a shot of protein** like 1 cup of fat-free Greek yogurt, 2 eggs, 3 ounces of smoked salmon, ½ cup of tofu, 4 slices of tempeh bacon, or a scoop of protein powder. Protein should make up about a quarter of your meal, or 25 g, to help keep you fuller longer, stabilize blood sugar, and blunt cravings.
- **Finish with fat** like 1 tablespoon of almond butter, 2 teaspoons of olive or flaxseed oil, or a quarter of an avocado. These healthy fats don't just make breakfast taste better but also give the meal some staying power in your stomach. Aim to make fat 20 to 25% of your calories, or about 10 g. Most of that should be mono- or polyunsaturated



fats, but 2 to 3 g of saturated fat, like that found in 2 eggs, is fine, too.

BREAKFAST MEANS MORNING, NOT AFTERNOON. You don't have to eat the minute you wake up, but try to get something in your stomach within an hour or two of rising. "When you wait too long, your

metabolism starts to slow down in an effort to conserve fuel," says Giovinazzo. You're also more likely to feel ravenous by midmorning.

And that's really the point: Fill up on a wholesome breakfast that follows our formula and you won't have room for the type of fare that used to sabotage your morning—processed cereals, bacon and sausage (often high in saturated fat and heart-unhealthy nitrites), packaged baked goods, and sugary instant oatmeal.

You don't have to rule out the sweet stuff completely. Just make it less than 5 g, a light pour. After all, there's nothing more satisfying than a teaspoon of honey on top of your toast or a drizzle of maple syrup on your oatmeal—especially when you know breakfast is setting you up to eat less later on.