

Debunking 7 Myths About Breakfast, The Most Important Meal Of The Day



Breakfast is a hot-button topic in the nutrition world. The debate has been raging for decades, and with so much confusion about what to eat (or if we should even eat at all), there are no signs of it slowing down.

Everyone has their own opinion. It doesn't matter if you're talking to a trained dietician or your Aunt Erma. As soon as someone finds out your thoughts on breakfast differ from their own, they'll let you hear it.

With the wealth of scientific research available, the challenge is sorting through it all.

How should you approach breakfast to embrace a healthier lifestyle?

Whose opinion should you pay attention to?

Let's dive in.

Why There Is So Much Confusion

Everyone seems to have an opinion about breakfast, but where did those opinions come from?

For most people, it's information they heard from their friends, saw on TV, or read online. The same old viewpoints get passed around and repeated so many times we end up embracing them as absolute truths.

This explains the looks of horror you'll get after telling someone you skipped breakfast that morning. People mean well. The problem is that they only have their opinions to go on. Unfortunately, a lot of the most common ones are simply untrue.

To learn the truth about breakfast, we have to turn to what the science says and question the norms. As you'll see in just a second, a lot of the research directly challenges the conventional wisdom we've heard for years.

Questioning Conventional Wisdom

Discovering the truth about breakfast forces us to challenge conventional wisdom and see which pieces hold up.

What are the misconceptions?

Here are seven of the most common breakfast myths:

1. Breakfast Is the Most Important Meal of the Day

This is probably the most common breakfast myth of all. I can't tell you how many times I've heard this over the years.

The "magical breakfast" myth brought a lot of annoyance into my middle school years. I'd wake up and get ready for school, still full from the night before. But my mom wouldn't stop scolding me until I shoveled some food down my throat before I walked out the door.

Sound familiar? Maybe you've had a coworker, significant other, or family member behave the same way. These people mean well, but it can be a nightmare if you just aren't hungry in the mornings.

In a lot of ways, this myth is the foundation on which all the other breakfast myths lie. Scientific studies, however, have called it into serious question.

A study published in *The British Journal of Nutrition* found that meal timing doesn't matter. In other words, the world won't fall apart if you wait until lunch. Your body processes the same amount of calories in the same way - regardless if you consume them in one sitting or many of them.

2. Eggs Are Unhealthy

Once a breakfast staple, eggs have been vilified by nutritionists for decades. It was common to hear people harping about their saturated fat and cholesterol content. Some nutritionists still do, citing concerns about high cholesterol and heart disease.

Yet the scientific evidence calls all those perspectives into question. Not only are eggs not unhealthy; they're actually some of the best breakfast foods you can eat. Eggs are rich sources of protein, selenium, phosphorous, and various B vitamins.



And the worries about heart disease? Numerous studies have found no association between regular egg consumption and incidence of heart disease. Because our bodies make almost all of our cholesterol, dietary cholesterol has an insignificant - if any - effect on cholesterol levels in the blood.

Isn't it interesting how so much nutrition advice comes full circle? Foods like grass-fed butter, eggs, and red meat go from villains to darlings as new research emerges.

3. Skipping Breakfast Puts Your Body into “Starvation Mode”

A dangerous myth that's popular with gym enthusiasts is the idea that skipping breakfast will cause our bodies to lose muscle. You'll find many of these types dutifully downing oatmeal and protein shakes - even when they're well past full.

The idea? Because we fast while we sleep, we desperately need food right when we wake up. Otherwise, our metabolisms will slow down and we'll eventually enter a catabolic state (when muscle starts to break down).

This simply isn't true. Yes, sleep is technically a fast. However, the fast is simply too short to slow our metabolisms, much less induce a catabolic state.

One study compared the effects of fasts of various lengths and found that even a three-day fast slightly increased metabolism rates. So we have nothing to worry about if we decide to extend our sleep fasts until lunch.

As far as the danger to muscle mass, research reveals short-term fasts are fine. They might be even better for maintaining lean muscle. One study compared the effects of calorie restriction and found that intermittent restriction (fasting) resulted in a similar amount of weight loss but less reduction in muscle.

4. Eating Breakfast Puts You into a “Food Coma”

The non-breakfast folks like to point out how sluggish they feel after eating in the morning.

You know that nine or ten in the morning slump? That's what they're trying to avoid, so they just skip eating until it's time for lunch.

There are a few problems with this. First, it assumes that everyone wakes up feeling the same amount of hunger. Some people are starving in the mornings; it's hard for them to get moving without a meal before work or school.

The second problem: it paints every breakfast with the same brush. The types of food you eat make a huge difference. If you make some toast and jelly and wash it down with orange juice, you'll feel a lot different in two hours than someone who has an omelet with avocado slices.

Simple carbs and sugars are processed extremely fast in the body. You feel a burst of energy after eating them as your blood sugar skyrockets. But that burst soon turns into a crash when your body secretes insulin to stabilize the system.

On the other hand, breakfast focused on proteins and fats offer a steadier energy source. You won't be jumping off the walls, but you won't feel like a slug afterward either.

Bottom line: breakfasts can put you into a food coma. Or not. It just depends on what you eat.

5. Breakfast Makes You More Alert and Improves Concentration

Eating breakfast is also rumored to kick-start your day mentally, providing you with the focus you need to get to work.

This isn't exactly true. A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition compared the cognitive function of two groups of young adults. One group ate normally while the second group followed a strict calorie-deprived diet. After two days, there were no adverse effects on vigilance, reaction time, learning, or memory.

Another study of school children found that, while eating breakfast improved cognitive function for some, the kids who benefited the most probably didn't have access to enough food at home. So we can't say it will improve focus across the board.

If you wake up with your stomach rumbling then try to take a test, it makes sense that you wouldn't do as well because you're distracted. But if you aren't hungry, then force yourself to eat, you might have sabotaged yourself because now all you can think about is how full you feel.

This affects all of us differently. A good guideline to follow: if skipping breakfast makes you hungry to the point of distraction, eat. The rest of us get a bit more leeway.

6. Skipping Breakfast Makes You Gain Weight

"You have to eat breakfast! Don't you want to kick your metabolism into gear?"

You might have heard something similar to this during a quest to lose weight. Trainers and nutritionists regularly recommend their clients eat breakfast for this very reason.

Some studies do support their reasoning with correlations between eating

breakfast and lower rates of obesity. But that research has plenty of systemic flaws and might be an effort to “distort scientific evidence” as pointed out by a review published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Another clinical trial studied the effects of skipping versus eating breakfast and found “no discernible impact on weight loss.”

We also have to address the metabolism issue. The reality is that our bodies operate at a similar metabolic rate regardless if we eat breakfast. Another study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that eating breakfast had zero impact on resting metabolic rates.

If we consume fewer calories than we burn, we will lose weight. It doesn't matter if we space those calories across two or three meals - or even six.

7. Everyone Should Eat Breakfast

The thinking that everyone should eat breakfast (whether they're hungry or not) is way too general to be of any use.

There are huge variations in appetite and energy levels in the morning. Some people can sail right through until lunch without a second thought. Others can't get out the door without a meal.

You might fall into the middle ground. On some days you feel hungry, but on others, you don't. It's best to let your body's natural signals be the guide.

It's time to start rethinking the breakfast “shoulds.” Some of us will eat it. Some of us won't. For many of us, it will depend on the day. That's all perfectly fine!

Eating Breakfast a Personal Decision

Some people, looking for health but not wanting to make the lifestyle changes needed to have it, hold up breakfast as a “silver bullet” for better health.

But breakfast isn't magical. As the research above points out, breakfast is a regular meal like any other. Whether you decide to eat it depends on your unique situation.

Wake up starving every morning? By all means, eat! On the other hand, there's no reason to force feed yourself if you're fine until lunch.

Use your hunger and energy as guides. They'll get you a lot farther than conventional (debunked) wisdom that has been repeated to the point of becoming a cliché.

Now It's Your Turn

The science of nutrition is advancing rapidly. We can't afford to let myths about breakfast hold us back - even if we've heard them countless times over the years.

Now that you know the truth, it's easier to look past the myths and stop stressing so much. Breakfast (if you eat it) is meant to be enjoyed and help you achieve better health.

Do you eat breakfast? Why, or why not? Have you bought into any of the misconceptions above? Leave a comment below and share your experience!