

Mothers have used that statement to coax children into eating breakfast for years. As it turns out, mom was right, and according to TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the nonprofit weight-loss support organization, there's research to back her up.

Getting a good mix of protein, whole grains, fiber, and fruit every morning can help boost metabolism, increase energy for both the body and the brain, and help curb cravings for sweets and other foods high in fat.

Research has shown that skipping meals, and especially skipping breakfast, also can make individuals more likely to eat more at the next meal or to eat high-calorie snacks before the next meal.

“Breakfast gets your metabolism going in the morning so you actually burn more calories during the day,” says Joan Pleuss, R.D., C.D.E., M.S., C.D., Senior Research Dietitian in the General Clinical Research Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin and nutritional expert for TOPS.

“However, that doesn't mean that you should use that as an excuse to overeat later in the day. Actually, the reverse may happen, as eating breakfast can decrease the likelihood that you will be as hungry later on.”

The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR) was founded more than 20 years ago to document the habits of people who were age 18 and older and who had lost at least 30 pounds of excess weight that they had kept off for at least a year. One habit the researchers found was that 78 percent of the people in the Registry ate breakfast every day and that only four percent never ate breakfast.

In the NWCR, the typical breakfast was cereal and fruit. Another study found that those individuals who ate a ready-to-eat cereal for breakfast had a higher fiber content in their total diet than those individuals who didn't eat a ready-to-eat cereal.

Other studies have reported that people who eat a ready-to-eat cereal for breakfast tend to be leaner than people who don't eat breakfast or eat other types of food for breakfast.

“The best breakfasts are rich in fiber and protein,” notes Pleuss. “Not only do they digest slowly, which means a longer time between hunger pains, a fiber-rich diet can help lower the risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and colon cancer.”

Putting this advice to practical use doesn't have to mean going to the store and spending a small fortune on specialty foods. Instead, a few well-planned changes, like switching to a whole-grain, wheat bread from white, can make all the difference.

“If waffles are a morning favorite, plan to purchase whole-wheat waffles in place of the more generic, processed varieties,” recommends Pleuss. “Pairing the waffles with some low-fat fruit yogurt is a great way to start the day healthy and curb the urge to binge before lunch.”

If lack of time is the reason you skip breakfast, try getting items ready the night before. Pour out the cereal and cut up the fruit. Place the oatmeal in the bowl so you only need to add the milk or water in the morning. Microwave it while you are getting dressed.

Also have available foods that you can grab and go, like whole fruit, bagels, high-fiber breakfast bars, trail mix comprised of nuts and dried fruit, dry cereal, low-fat or fat-free yogurt, and 100 percent juice.