LifeStyles with Sylvia

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe a month has already gone by since my last column, but in the past couple of weeks the fall weather has announced its arrival loud and clear. While the end of summer can be disappointing to some though, I like to think of the change of seasons as an opportunity to reflect on all of the positive change around us. And I can't think of any more positive changes around me than the progress I've seen so many of you make towards your fitness and weight loss goals. Congratulations and keep it up!

To help you do just that, I want to focus on one question in this month's column: "Is breakfast *really* the most important meal of the day?" In short, the answer is yes, and here's why: a healthy breakfast sets the stage for healthy eating throughout the day and can actually help you lose weight!

For most people, breakfast time comes at least eight hours after the previous meal. In other words, you don't just spend your nights sleeping—you also spend them fasting. In fact, the word breakfast itself, when broken down, means to "break a fast." As a result, when you wake up in the morning after fasting for eight hours, your body desperately needs fuel. Technically speaking, your blood sugar is low, which in turn makes you hungry.

So if breakfast is so important, how can you make the most of it? Eating a breakfast that contains a good source of both protein and complex carbohydrates will allow your blood sugar to rise at a steady pace throughout the morning and provide your cells with the energy they need to carry out your activities. For example, oatmeal topped with fruit and soymilk, along with a generous helping of nuts and seeds, is a great way to start the day. Not your style? Try a poached egg over whole grain toast. Or, for a super-quick meal on the run, spread some almond butter on a piece of whole grain toast and eat a piece of fruit along with it. As a general rule, try not to start your day eating foods that are high in refined carbohydrates, such as bagels, muffins or pastries made from white flour. These foods can cause a rapid spike in blood sugar, which may give you a short burst of energy right away, but will eventually cause you to "crash" a few hours later.

What happens if you skip breakfast? If you don't fuel your body first thing in the morning, your blood sugar will continue to drop. In addition, your body will begin to tap into your nutrient stores in order to hold you over until your next meal. Over the next few hours, you may begin to feel sleepy or fatigued, and by the time lunch rolls around, you will probably be hungry enough to eat anything in sight! As a result, you'll be making it extra hard on yourself to make healthy choices, as you will likely be more interested in grabbing something nearby to satisfy your body's need for food as quickly as possible.

Not a pretty picture, right? That's why these side affects of skipping breakfast are considered to be some of the reasons that studies have shown that people who eat breakfast regularly lose weight. In fact, research done by the National Weight Control Registry indicates that there are several possible reasons why regular breakfast eating may be an essential behavior for weight loss maintenance:

- Eating breakfast may reduce the hunger experience later in the day that leads to overeating.
- Breakfast eaters are able to better resist fatty and high-calorie foods throughout the day.
- Nutrients consumed at breakfast may give people a better ability to be more physically active.

So what if you're just not hungry first thing in the morning? Try getting into habit of eating breakfast by starting with something very small, such as a half piece of whole grain toast with nut butter or a small bowl of whole grain cereal (with no added sugars, please!) with milk. As your body gets used to digesting food in the morning, you might just develop a bigger appetite for breakfast.

In short, eating breakfast, or breaking your fast, every morning can actually help you lose weight. And speaking of fasting, for those of you who observed the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur this week, I hope your fast was an easy one, and when you break it next year, may you spread your cream cheese and lox on a whole grain bagel!

L'Shanah Tova. May you and your families all have a Happy and Healthy New Year!

Until next time, happy healthful eating,

Sylvia

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