

The 9 Worst Breakfasts for Your Waistline - and What to Choose Instead

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Julie Upton, M.S., R.D., C.S.S.D.

Julie Upton is co-founder of Appetite for Health and is a certified sports dietitian who has been writing since 1994. She is a nationally recognized journalist who has contributed to "The New York Times," "Shape" and "Men's Health." Upton is also the coauthor of "The Real Skinny: Appetite for Health's 101 Fat Habits & Slim Solutions." She holds a Master of Science in nutrition communications.

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There's been a lot of news about breakfast lately -- both good and bad. Some studies suggest breakfast may not be necessary to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, but that doesn't mean skipping out on your first meal is a healthy habit. A high-quality breakfast can start your day off right -- providing you with lasting energy to fuel your day, curb your cravings and help lower your risk for some chronic conditions. Here are nine of the worst choices for breakfast and our top picks to get your day off to a healthier start.

WORST BREAKFAST #1: No Breakfast at All

While a recent human clinical trial reported that eating breakfast isn't necessary for weight loss, there are plenty of other studies that suggest otherwise. In the largest sample of successful dieters, 78 percent reported eating breakfast every day. Still, nearly a quarter of U.S. adults skip their first meal on any given

day -- and that increases your risk for other chronic conditions. What's more, a Harvard study reported that men who skipped breakfast were 27 percent more likely to develop heart disease and that female breakfast skippers had a 28 percent higher risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Eating breakfast may also give you more energy: One study found that breakfast eaters burned 400 more calories during a day through increased daily activity.

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WORST BREAKFAST #2: Store-Bought Smoothies

Smoothies have a health halo, but unless you make it yourself, your smoothie may have more calories than a Big Mac and fries. A Jamba Juice PB Chocolate Love will weigh you down with some 870 calories, and the chain's Kale-ribbean Breeze comes in at 500 calories and 85 grams of sugar (21 teaspoons) per 28-ounce serving. Even grocery-store smoothies can have a natural sugar content similar to soda. And, despite the flavor, they're usually just dressed-up apple juice. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Enjoy DIY smoothies with a base of Greek yogurt, frozen fruit (no added sugars) and milk.

WORST BREAKFAST #3: Juices or Juicing

Despite being lower in calories than smoothies and rich in myriad vitamins and antioxidants, juices aren't the best way to start your day because most lack filling fiber and often pack in more natural sugar than a cola (e.g., Naked Juice Green Machine). Liquid sources of natural sugars cause a more rapid rise in blood sugar and insulin levels, compared with eating solid foods of similar nutritional value (i.e., apple juice versus whole apples). Researchers reported in *The BMJ* that fruit juice was linked with increased risk for diabetes. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Stop juicing and start eating! Opt for breakfasts with whole fruit and lean proteins like a bowl of Greek yogurt with fresh berries or sliced banana.

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WORST BREAKFAST #4: Itty-Bitty Breakfasts

Smaller breakfasts may equal large waistlines. In a study published in the journal *Obesity*, 93 obese women with metabolic syndrome were divided into two diet groups, each consuming 1,400 calories. One group ate a big breakfast totaling about 700 calories, and then 500 calories at lunch and 200 calories at dinner. The second group ate the opposite: 200 calories at breakfast, 500 at lunch and 700 at dinner. Results? The big-breakfast group lost nearly 18 pounds versus 7.3 pounds lost in the big-dinner group. Other studies have found similar results, and researchers believe that we may become more insulin resistant in the afternoon and evening and the body burns fewer calories. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Eat a hearty breakfast with at least 350 calories and a minimum of 20 grams of protein for increased satisfaction.

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WORST BREAKFAST #5: Waffles, Pancakes, Bagels and Muffins

Waffles, pancakes, bagels and muffins are common breakfast choices, but they are rich in one thing you don't want to start your day with: refined flour. They also lack filling fiber or protein. In fact, one study of dieters found those who ate an egg-based breakfast (as opposed to an equal-calorie bagel-only breakfast)

lost 65 percent more weight and lost more belly fat. The authors suggest that carbohydrate-rich breakfasts provide only half as much satiety as an egg-based breakfast, making it harder for dieters to stick to their plans. Top Picks: If you're craving carbohydrates, make a pancake, waffle or mini muffin using whole grain flour as a side dish to your eggs.

WORST BREAKFAST #6: Egg Sandwiches.

One of the most popular breakfast choices is a classic egg sandwich -- a fried egg, ham and cheese on a toasted bagel or English muffin. Breakfast sandwiches have about 300 to 400 calories (lower than most bakery breakfasts), but most have up to four times as much low-quality carbs as protein. Because they generally are made with one egg, they fall short of the recommended 25 to 30 grams of protein needed for increased satiety and muscle protein synthesis. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Make your own sandwich using two eggs and one slice of lean Canadian bacon served in a whole-grain English muffin, bread or tortilla. When eating out always ask for your egg sandwich on a skinnier English muffin and check to see if the option of a breakfast "bowl" is available.

WORST BREAKFAST #7: Specialty Coffee Drinks

More than one third of coffee drinkers enjoy specialty coffee drinks every day, according to the National Coffee Association. But many of these beverages have more than 300 calories and can pack in more sugar than a bowl of Froot Loops, making them more like liquid candy. For example, most 16-ounce coffee drinks (e.g., mochas, macchiatos and frappuccinos) have seven to eight teaspoons of sugar, and even a seemingly healthy green tea latte made with soymilk crams in some 14 teaspoons of sugar -- more than four times as much sugar as a serving of Froot Loops! A sugary start to your day may lead to increased hunger and cravings for sweets once the blood sugar levels plummet. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Opt for cappuccino or lattes and downsize to a small (12 ounce). Skip the added whipped cream and syrups. And if you like almond or soy milk, ask if it's unsweetened.

WORST BREAKFAST #8: "Whole Grain" or "High Fiber" Cold Cereals

Don't let claims like "made with whole grains" or "high fiber" fool you. Research from Harvard published in Public Health Nutrition suggests whole-grain claims may indicate that the food is rich in sugar, sodium and higher in calories. The best bets they suggest are grains with one gram of fiber for every 10 grams of carbs. For example, a cereal with 30 grams of carbs should have at least three grams of fiber. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Some of the healthiest cereal options exceeding the Harvard guidelines include the following: Post Shredded Wheat Original, with 40 grams of carb and six grams of fiber, and Quaker Old Fashioned oats, with 27 grams of carbs and four grams fiber.

WORST BREAKFAST #9: Flavored Greek Yogurt

Greek yogurt is heralded as a superfood because it contains twice the protein and about half the natural sugars of regular yogurt if it's made using the traditional straining process. However, an industry report from the nonprofit watchdog Cornucopia Institute says yogurt has become junk food, due to the high amounts of added sugar, artificial ingredients and thickeners used to make them. The institute contends brands that often use artificial ingredients and flavored varieties are stuffed with five to seven teaspoons of added sugars per cup: That's more sugar than a glazed or powdered doughnut! A plain Greek yogurt has about one gram of natural milk sugar per ounce, or eight grams (two teaspoons) per cup. But some flavored varieties have three to four times that. **TOP PICKS FOR BETTER BREAKFAST OPTIONS:** Opt for low-sugar, protein-packed plain Greek yogurt (i.e., Fage and Oikos) and flavor with fresh or dried fruit.