



Premium breakfast fuels a better day

It's obvious that you won't get to your morning destination if you drive off with an empty gas tank. Why, then, is it so common to expect our bodies to run on empty for the early part of a day?

Fortunately, a healthy person who's low on fuel will not come to an abrupt halt the way a car runs out of gas. But studies show that most people do not get by as well when the body is on empty. Mental and physical performance can decline, and mood often takes a dive.

Question: How important is breakfast?

Answer: A number of studies have found that all age groups have better mental function when the brain has an adequate supply of fuel. The brain uses glucose as its main fuel, and that means the brain needs carbohydrates. Often it is difficult for a person to tell that their brain functions worsen when blood sugar drops, partly because they are not thinking as straight as usual. But studies point out that speed and accuracy of recalling information do decline.

Q: What types of foods make a good breakfast?

A: Almost any food is better than nothing, but the best breakfasts provide a balanced mixture of energy-containing nutrients. These are carbohydrate, protein and fat. Without all three energy sources, many people do poorly. A breakfast of mostly carbs can provide a quick burst of energy, but this is often followed by a mental dive or a surge in appetite. If the meal is primarily protein or fat, it can leave blood glucose running low -- along with brain function and mood. A mixture of all three energy sources can provide the desired mental sharpness, not followed by a dive.

Many possible combinations provide this good mix. Some people do well with the standard cereal, milk and fruit breakfast. Others find this breakfast does not stick with them long. Other healthy combinations could include rice or bread with eggs, a piece of fruit and glass of milk, or instant oatmeal with raisins and a scoop of yogurt on top.

Quick and convenient options that are munchable in the car

can be as simple as a cold apple with a slice of cheese. Or try peanut butter with crackers (made the night before) and a carton of milk. These might not be gourmet meals, but to your body's fuel tank they'll look like high-octane, premium fuel.

Many new convenience foods can make a quick and hearty breakfast. Frozen vegetarian burgers such as Morningstar Grillers can be extremely morning-friendly and convenient. All it takes is 10 seconds under running water and a minute to microwave. That's faster than waiting in the drive-through line.

Many options are possible. Even some protein/energy bars, along with an apple and milk, can be a reasonable start.

There are no hard and fast rules. For most people, something is better than nothing, and many people find that a mid-morning snack of fruit, yogurt or juice also helps to keep the brain on track.

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