

A Focus on Meals: Breakfast

I decided that it would be beneficial to actually talk about the benefits of each meal to help people plan their daily requirements. We often talk about breakfast being the most important meal, but why is that the case? What is breakfast or each other meal actually meant for? In my next few articles, I will be discussing the importance of each meal. The benefit of working with such a great team at The Food Coach is that these articles will be staggered throughout the year. This will help you to make positive changes are an approach that is realistic and maintainable. Each time you read the next instalment, you can then implement the next level of change and eventually your diet will have had a complete overhaul – great news all round!

Logically, the first meal I want to focus on is breakfast.

If we look at our body as a wonderful vessel that goes through numerous biochemical reactions every minute of the day we realise that when we wake up in the morning, we have actually fasted since our last meal. This can mean that our previous meal can sometimes be between 6-14 hours beforehand.

We're all familiar with the sensations associated with missing meals throughout the day, but the subtle clues of hypoglycaemia can be often missed as we're are just waking up. Common morning symptoms of hypoglycaemia include:

- Fatigue (sometimes difficult to discern from lack of sleep!)
- Difficulty getting out of the bed or starting the day
- Mild headaches
- Dizziness or shakiness
- Mild nausea
- Poor concentration
- Generally just feeling as though the world has started without you!

From a metabolic perspective, our metabolism needs a 'kick start' in the morning and needs to be stimulated so that proper digestion and metabolic processes can easily occur throughout the day. The easiest and most important strategy to start your day well is to eat foods that are balanced. I often tell this theory to students and patients "What you start your day with is what you end your day with – i.e. start your day with sweet foods and you'll be sure that for the rest of the day you'll be trying to reach that sugar high". In simple terms this means start your day with complex carbohydrates, adequate protein and good quality essential fatty acids and you'll be sure to get your metabolism right.

Foods to encourage for breakfast

Complex carbohydrates:

- Wholegrain, stone-ground breads
- Rolled oats, homemade muesli, other grain based porridges
- Homemade pancakes made from buckwheat (savoury)
- Fresh vegetables and vegetable juices

Essential fatty acids:

- Fish (tinned or fresh)
- Avocado
- Cold pressed oils such as olive or flaxseed oil
- Nut butters from a variety of nuts

Protein, protein and more protein!

- Eggs (organic)
- Full fat dairy (in small amounts) including cheese, yogurt
- Fish (tinned or fresh)
- Nut butters, nut meals (LSA powder), natural nuts and seeds or nut milks such as almond milk
- Legumes or pulses either as a dahl/casserole or in a dip (humous, tahina)
- Tahini spread (sesame spread)
- Tofu
- Wholegrains when combined with another vegetarian protein source (legume or pulse, nut or seed)

Foods to avoid for breakfast

Sugar in any form:

- Refined white bread, crackers, waffles, pancakes
- Refined processed cereals (packaged cereals)
- Honey, sugar, maple syrup, jam, chocolate spreads
- Low fat dairy – when they remove/reduce the fat component of the dairy the sugar component (lactose) has a greater impact on blood sugar levels

Other blood sugar de-stabilisers:

- Caffeine and other stimulants
 - Hot chocolate
 - Coffee and coffee drinks
 - Tea (caffeinated)

Conclusion

If you can't jump into grilled salmon and green vegetables just yet, start by making small changes. For example, instead of having jam on toast replace the bread with a wholegrain variety and add some nut butter underneath the jam to add more protein and stabilise your response. Eventually your palate will change and you'll be more adventurous with breakfast. We've somehow been programmed to think that breakfast has to be sweet but once you've made the switch everything in your day will get better – concentration, mood, energy levels and overall general wellbeing. Enjoy!

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