

Thinking Outside the Cereal Box

Protein and Nutrient-Rich Breakfast Fare

Let's face it. Most of us grew up pouring "the most important meal of the day" from a cardboard box, excluding, perhaps, hearty-breakfast types like farmers and ranchers. Cheerios®, cornflakes, Grape-Nuts® and assorted sugary cereals seized the morning American palette in the wake of a "natural food craze" to eat grains for breakfast in the early 1900s. Throw in thinly veiled marketing during Saturday morning cartoons, and a devotion to all things flaked and puffed became rabid, resulting in grocery aisles filled with a seductive selection of cereals.

Eating whole grain, high-fiber cereal is a good thing. In fact, many Americans get the majority of their fiber from high-fiber cereals, some of which include a good dose of protein. But for those minding their weight and their intake of carbohydrates, consider switching to a protein-rich alternative — something that doesn't live in a box.



According to Eisenhower Medical Center Board Certified Gynecologist Lisa Lindley, MD, some individuals may lose weight by changing only one thing in their daily routine — what they eat for breakfast. "I had a patient who needed to lose weight; she ate oatmeal and a banana for breakfast every morning," explains Dr. Lindley, who holds a certificate in Obesity Medicine. "If you don't need to lose weight, that combination might be okay, although it won't provide much protein. I recommended that my patient begin her day by switching to eating protein-rich foods like eggs, non-fat Greek yogurt or cottage cheese. She started to lose weight simply because she changed what she was eating for breakfast."

According to Dr. Lindley, morning is when we break our evening fast. As we begin our day, our bodies are looking for an adequate fuel source. Carbohydrates — like cereals, toast or pancakes — are immediately converted to sugar.

"If you're eating carbohydrates, your body will use what it needs for fuel and store the rest as fat. If you eat protein, your body metabolizes it as nutrition but burns your fat store for glucose," says Dr. Lindley. "If you're not trying to lose weight, having your carbohydrate with your protein is fine. But the fewer carbs you eat, the faster you'll lose weight."

There are many protein-rich breakfast options from which to choose. Try thinking outside the cereal box and be open to new breakfast menu items, including savory foods, dinner leftovers or your own new creations. Staying on track can be easier with a food journal. Note what you eat for breakfast each day and how it made you feel during the morning. Make note of your energy level, how long your breakfast sustained you before you needed a snack or lunch, weight changes and whether you enjoy what you eat.

Protein-Packed Breakfast Options

Egg and veggie omelet: Sauté onions, bell peppers, finely chopped broccoli, spinach and zucchini before adding two beaten eggs or three egg whites. Add a sprinkling of feta cheese if desired.

Non-fat Greek yogurt: Look for yogurt with around 15 grams of protein per six ounces, 100 calories and no added sugar. Add fresh fruit, a scant drizzle of honey and a tablespoon of chopped nuts for a delicious, nutritious breakfast.

Savory leftovers: Last night's dinner of cooked quinoa, roasted veggies and grilled chicken makes a protein-packed breakfast alternative.

Protein shakes: Blend one half to one whole cup of frozen fruit with one large scoop of protein powder (whey, soy or other), one tablespoon of flax seed, four ounces of almond or skim milk, and four to eight ounces of ice cold water.

Breakfast fare on the run: Grab hard boiled eggs, protein bars (be mindful of calories, carbohydrates and added sugar), individual Greek yogurt servings, almonds, apple slices and cottage cheese, or sliced turkey.

Tips for planning ahead: Fill refrigerator containers with cut veggies and chopped onions, to keep morning omelet prep to a minimum. Write out a week's worth of daily menus and organize the ingredients for quick access. Wash fruits and vegetables ahead of time (except fresh berries). If you're planning to "grab and go," pack your breakfast and lunch the night before. Keep protein bars and raw nuts such as walnuts and almonds stashed in small bags in your purse, car, or briefcase for quick and healthy snacks. Carry water and drink often.

Every Monday, Dr. Lindley offers ongoing, free Lunch and Lose classes at Eisenhower Medical Center. Visit emc.org/calendar or pick up a calendar listing of classes, lectures and events at any Eisenhower location. Reservations are required. For more information or to register, call 760-568-1234.

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