Hi Alice,

I am 21 years old and not overly active. I was wondering what I should be eating for breakfast to improve my energy?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Regardless of your activity level, breakfast is a part of a healthful lifestyle and can help you maintain your energy all day long. The motto here is anything for breakfast is better than nothing at all. Think of your body as a car and food as gas. Without gas, your car can’t get from one place to another.

The rate at which your body uses calories for energy is known as metabolism. Think of metabolism as the motor of your car. Metabolism is directly related to energy levels, so the higher your metabolism, the more energy you have throughout the day. When you are sleeping, your body naturally decreases its metabolism. When you wake up, there is an increase in metabolism, which peaks by noon. How much energy you have during this time is contingent on how much food calories your body has to use for energy. Breakfast becomes the first stop to the gas station before your road trip. So basically, eating breakfast actually helps maintain high energy levels throughout the day. In fact, the more hearty a breakfast you have, the more your metabolism motor will roar!

Sticking to a few guidelines, of course, can help you get the most out of your morning meal:

**Calories**: For the first meal of the day, an optimal breakfast contains between 350 to 500 calories. Below 350, your body will not fulfill the requirements for morning energy usage; above 500, your body may store unneeded calories as fat.

**Balance**: Plan and eat a balanced breakfast meal including complex carbohydrate, protein, fat, and a fruit or vegetable.

**Quantity to Aim for**:

- **1 to 2 servings of complex carbohydrates.** One serving equals 1 piece of bread, ½ cup of cooked oatmeal, 1 cup of dry cereal, 1 English muffin, ½ bagel, ¼ cup of granola, or 1 small muffin.
• **1 serving of protein.** For example, 1 cup of yogurt, ½ cup of cottage cheese, 1 ounce of cheese, 1 large egg, 2 ounces of smoked salmon, 1 cup of milk or soy milk, 2 tablespoons (T) of peanut butter, or ¼ cup of nuts or seeds.
• **1 serving of fat.** E.g., 1 teaspoon (t) of butter, 1 t of oil, 1 tablespoon (T) of cream cheese. Make sure to check your protein and carbohydrates for fat; there's no need to add extra if you have a serving of fat in your granola, omelet, or dairy products.
• **1 serving of a fruit or vegetable.** That is, 1 medium piece of fruit, 1 cup of cut fruit, ¼ cup dried fruit, 6 ounces of fruit juice, 1 cup of raw or ½ cup of cooked vegetables, or 1 cup of vegetable juice.

Some examples of energizing breakfast meals include:

- 2 slices of whole wheat or whole grain toast with 2 tablespoons of peanut butter and 1 medium banana (sliced on top of the toast or on the side
- ½ wheat bagel topped with 1 tablespoon of cream cheese, 2 ounces of smoked salmon, and ½ cup of sliced tomatoes
- 1 cup cooked oatmeal with ¼ cup of raisins mixed in and 1 cup of 2 percent fat milk on the side
- 1 small muffin with 1 cup of low-fat yogurt, and 6 ounces of orange juice
- 1 serving of last night’s fried rice with 1 poached egg on top
- 1 serving chicken, noodle, and vegetable soup

As you see, there are many delicious ways to get from point A to point B every morning. Try out a few to see which ones you like best and you might just be pleasantly surprised when you have more energy!

Alice!

Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Optimal Nutrition
Healthy Eating

**Related questions**

Fatigue and serotonin?
Ice cream for breakfast?
Importance of eating breakfast

**Resources**

Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside)
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC)
Published date:
Feb 24, 2005
Last reviewed on:
Aug 20, 2015
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/breakfast-first-chance-fill-your-tank-0

Links