Will skipping breakfast and lunch lead to weight loss? [1]

Alice,

I have a friend who wants to lose weight. She thinks that if she skips breakfast and lunch, she will lose weight. Can this harm her or not? I know it's bad for her, but she doesn't understand.

? Trying to be a good friend

Answer

Dear Trying to be a good friend,

Although your friend may have good reasons for losing weight, you are right in saying that skipping meals is not the way to do it. Even though skipping meals might mean your friend is eating fewer times a day, it doesn't mean that she will lose as much weight as she thinks she will. Eating at regular intervals is important because it helps keep the metabolic rate up. If a person goes all day without eating, the body goes into starvation mode. This means her/his metabolic rate will slow down, and her/his body will conserve energy and expend fewer calories. When s/he does eat, s/he may have problems being able to stop when full. When someone ignores the hunger and satiety signals for an extended period of time, it can be difficult to tell when s/he is hungry or full when eating. This could cause your friend to overeat and possibly even gain rather than lose weight.

Additionally, going for hours without eating deprives the brain of glucose, which is needed for normal functioning. Lack of glucose to the brain can lead to irritability, dizziness, and fainting, as well as more serious conditions like hypoglycemia. Not eating regularly throughout the day puts your friend at a higher risk for long-term nutritional deficiencies including anemia, stunted growth (depending on her age), loss of bone or incomplete bone development, decreased immune function, amenorrhea (loss of menstrual periods), decreased thyroid function, increased susceptibility to colds and infections, low energy levels, poor concentration and cognitive development, and gum infections and poor dental health, just to name a few. This is because one meal a day, no matter the size, is unlikely to provide a person with all the nutrients s/he needs to function properly.

If you are comfortable with it, you can tactfully let your friend know how eating only one meal a day, regardless of size, is detrimental to her health. Advise her to try several small meals or snacks over the course of the day, rather than only one meal once a day. Physical activity should also be incorporated into her daily routine in order to encourage healthful and safe weight loss. Your friend could also consult with a registered dietitian or health care provider.
for guidance on safely achieve her weight loss goals. For more of the skinny on healthy eating, feel free to check out Alice!’s Nutrition & Physical Activity archives. Your concern and thoughtful question shows that you are a good friend indeed.

Alice!
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Nutrition & Physical Activity
Weight Gain & Loss

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Medical Services (Morningside)
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