

Join the breakfast club!

Enjoy a balanced brekkie and you're on to a winner, say the experts...

For us Brits, the average night's sleep is seven hours, 22 minutes. That means when you wake up in the morning, you've fasted for the equivalent of almost a full working day! But do you know what and when you should be eating when it comes to breakfast? Apparently,

most of us don't. And a recent study showed one in ten of us skips breakfast.

To celebrate Breakfast Week (January 24-30), **new!** gets the low-down from experts on how to start your day. It's time to wake up and smell the coffee (and eat the porridge)...

WHY DO WE NEED BREAKFAST?

Breakfast doesn't just give you energy to face the day, it can also help prevent hypertension and weight gain. "Skipping breakfast has consistently been linked to health risks such as high blood pressure and being overweight, and missing breakfast keeps your body in a fasting state for longer," says Dr Shikha Pitalia, GP and director at Pall Mall Medical. "The body finds prolonged fasting stressful and the result can be a disruption of your normal metabolism. This can lead to insulin resistance, raised cholesterol and blood pressure problems, which can then lead to heart disease."

What's more, tucking into that bowl of porridge could also see you reaping the benefits at work. "Studies show that eating a healthy breakfast can improve concentration," says Dr Shikha. "Breakfast skippers sometimes accomplish less work, are physically less steady and can be slower at making decisions."

A recent study by Cardiff University showed that children are twice as likely to score higher than average grades if they have a healthy breakfast. Other research showed that those who don't eat first thing lose a staggering 82 minutes of the working day due to poor productivity, costing the British economy £300 million a year!

TIME IT RIGHT

Not only does eating soon after waking help to physically and mentally prepare you for the day's challenges, it also reduces the chance of you reaching for unhealthy mid-morning snacks.

"When you eat in the morning, you are literally 'breaking' your overnight 'fast'. So, without the first meal of the day, you're running on empty," says registered dietitian Nichola Whitehead. "That's why, if you skip breakfast, you may reach for a biscuit or crisps come 11am. It's important to eat it as soon as possible after waking too – that way, there's less opportunity to resort to high fat or high sugar food options."

And the stats back this up. One study showed we scoff 6.8 per cent more food throughout the day if we skip brekkie.

FUEL YOUR WORKOUT

"It's important you eat breakfast every morning, but women utilise body fat as energy if they eat prior to working out, so have something at least 45 minutes before you exercise," urges Steph Rice, who runs Busy Woman's Fitness Project and has worked with celebs including Pink.

If you have less time, opt for a pre-workout protein smoothie, otherwise a meal that includes carbs, protein and fats is ideal for before and after exercise. "This will help sustain or replace energy, hydrate, boost performance and preserve muscle," says Steph. "Unless you have intolerances or allergies, nothing natural is off limits."

For more information on Breakfast Week, visit Shakeupyourwakeup.com.

FIND A BALANCE

Instead of opting for sugar-laden cereals – many can contain up to four teaspoons of the white stuff – experts advise you try to get a healthy balance of the food groups.

"An ideal breakfast should have slow-release and wholegrain carbohydrates, protein, fruit and/or vegetables," says Nichola. "Try a handful of blueberries on your porridge, or add some vegetables to an omelette."

If you need to get out in a hurry, Nichola recommends a smoothie. "Include kale or spinach for a plant-based nutrient boost," she says. "And don't forget healthy fats. An avocado tastes delicious in a smoothie and a dollop of nut butter is delicious mixed into porridge."

Meanwhile, trainer Jamie Baird, who's worked with stars including Kate Beckinsale and Donna Air, says, "Eat as naturally and unprocessed as possible, with food from the best sources you can afford."

BREKKIE BELIEVERS

These celebs insist on a healthy start to the day

MILLIE MACKINTOSH

Fitness fan Millie, 26, says, "I juice a whole lemon into a pint of warm water before a high-protein breakfast of smoked salmon with poached eggs and avocado, or frittata with asparagus, and a black coffee with cinnamon."

VOGUE WILLIAMS

"I've just discovered overnight oats [when you soak oats and fruit in milk and yoghurt overnight]," says model and presenter Vogue, 29, who's the face of this year's Breakfast Week. "It's now my breakfast of choice and so quick and easy to make."

KHLOÉ KARDASHIAN

"Breakfast is a big glass of water, my ideal oatmeal (porridge) and a protein shake," says health-conscious Khloé, 31.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

One breakfast isn't enough for JT. "I'll have waffles with flaxseed and almond butter and one egg, scrambled," says the 35 year old. "Then I'll work out and have a second breakfast – another egg or a protein shake."

YOUR SEVEN-DAY BREAKFAST PLAN

Start your day with a brekkie bang, every morning of the week...

MONDAY

COCONUT AND BANANA PORRIDGE

Cook your porridge oats in a saucepan with milk, mashed banana and fresh coconut, then top with more coconut, a sprinkling of dark muscovado sugar (optional) and some chopped banana.



FRIDAY

OMELETTE WRAP

Stir-fry some courgette and carrot batons, and spring onions cut into strips. Season with soy sauce. Make an omelette and use it as a "wrap" to fold around the vegetables. Drizzle with sweet chilli sauce.



TUESDAY

BREAKFAST SALAD

Whip up a salad of boiled new potatoes, chopped boiled egg, smoked ham, watercress and cherry tomatoes. Dress with a mix of pesto and rapeseed oil.



WEDNESDAY

GREEN SMOOTHIE

Put a ripe banana, a sprinkle of toasted rolled oats, a pinch of grated root ginger, a handful of kale and a big spoonful of natural yoghurt in your blender. Add apple juice and water then pulse until smooth. Serve in a tall glass.



THURSDAY

CHIA POTS

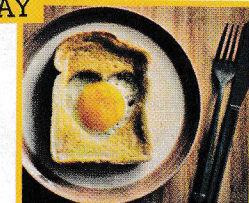
Boil up whole chia seeds and oats in a pan with milk, raspberries and some Earl Grey tea. Let the mixture cool, then stir in natural yoghurt and pour into bowls. Top with yoghurt, raspberries and mixed seeds.



SATURDAY

TOASTY EGGS

Tear a fried egg-sized circle from the middle of a slice of sourdough bread. Brush the bread with rapeseed oil and fry on each side, then crack an egg into the hole and cook for two minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and grill until golden.



SUNDAY

POSH BEANS ON TOAST

Cook up a tin of cannellini beans, a tin of chopped tomatoes and a tin of mixed beans with a splash of Worcestershire sauce and 2tbsp ketchup. Spoon onto some toast and top with a grilled Cumberland sausage.



'EATING BREAKFAST HELPED ME LOSE 6ST'

Zoe Jones, 27, an office worker from Pontypridd in Wales, used to eat nothing first thing in the morning. But when she joined Slimming World, she started eating a healthy breakfast and dropped from 15½st to 10st 10lbs...

"I always skipped breakfast as I never really thought about what I was eating – or when. By mid-morning I'd feel really hungry so I'd snack on whatever was to hand – usually a chocolate bar or biscuits – to boost my energy levels. Then I'd eat shop-bought sandwiches and snacks, followed by ready meals in the evening."

I was insecure about my appearance. I'd get upset easily and my confidence was at an all-time low. One day I had a heart to heart with my dad and it made me realise that the only thing standing in my way when it came to doing something about my weight was me.

So I joined Slimming World in July 2013. I'm 5ft 4in and I weighed 15½st and was a size 18. I went home with a new determination to follow the plan to the letter, which meant having a nutritious breakfast every day. So I started eating a bowl of porridge with fat-free yoghurt and fresh fruit in the mornings. It was really tasty and it kept me full until lunchtime.

It felt strange to eat so much food at breakfast when I wasn't used to it, but it soon became my favourite meal of the day. I lived on my own, so prepping breakfast the night before – something like overnight oats with fruit – helped me stay on track.

Now I weigh 10st 10lbs and am a size 10. Gone are the days when I'd refuse invitations because I felt self-conscious around my gorgeous friends. Eating breakfast has changed my life!

