

# Breakfast may be overrated

By Gretchen Reynolds, *New York Times*

For years, we've heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. But scientific support for that idea has been surprisingly meager, and a spate of new research at several different universities – published in multiple articles in the August issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* – could change the way we think about early-hours eating.

The largest and most provocative of the studies focused on whether breakfast plays a role in weight loss. Researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and other institutions recruited nearly 300 volunteers who were trying to lose weight. They randomly assigned subjects to either skip breakfast, always eat the meal or continue with their current dietary habits. (Each group contained people who habitually ate or skipped breakfast at the start, so some changed habits, and others did not.)

Sixteen weeks later, the volunteers returned to the lab to be weighed. No one had lost much, only a pound or so per person, with weight in all groups unaffected by whether someone ate breakfast or skipped it.

In another study – this one of lean volunteers – researchers at the University of Bath determined the resting metabolic rates, cholesterol levels and blood-sugar profiles of 33 participants and randomly assigned them to eat or skip breakfast. Volunteers were then provided with activity monitors.

After six weeks, their body weights, resting metabolic rates, cholesterol and most measures of blood sugar were about the same as they had been at the start, whether people ate breakfast or not. The one difference was that the breakfast eaters seemed to move around more during the morning; their

activity monitors showed that volunteers in this group burned almost 500 calories more in light-intensity movement. But by eating breakfast, they also consumed an additional 500 calories each day. Contrary to popular belief, skipping breakfast had not driven volunteers to wolf down enormous lunches and dinners – but it had made them somewhat more sluggish first thing in the morning.

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