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Breakfast 'keeps teenagers lean'

Body-conscious teenagers may believe cutting out breakfast will help them lose weight, but the opposite appears to be the case, US research suggests.

BBC News,

In a five year study of more than 2,000 youngsters, those who skipped breakfast were found to weigh about 5lbs (2.3kg) more than those who ate first thing. This was despite the fact that the breakfast-eaters consumed more calories in the course of the day. But the study in Pediatrics found they were likely to be much more active. The University of Minnesota research adds weight to a growing body of evidence that those who eat breakfast - whether young or old - are leaner than those who do not.

"It may seem counter-intuitive," said Mark Pereira, who led the research. "But while they ate more calories, they did more to burn those off, and that may be because those who ate breakfast did not feel so lethargic. "While it's best to go for a healthy option - a wholegrain cereal for instance - the evidence does seem to suggest that eating anything is better than eating nothing at all."

Mixed messages

Around 25% of the group studied regularly missed breakfast, and the problem was particularly pronounced among young women.

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"It's not just a girl problem, but it is certainly more of an issue among this group," said Mr Pereira. "They skip breakfast because they worry about weight gain - and it's ironic that the ones who aren't worried and eat in the mornings are the ones who keep their weight down."

Tam Fry, chairman of the Child Growth Foundation at the National Obesity Forum, said the findings of the study showed just how important it was to relay a clear and consistent message to young people. "The real problem is the profusion of messages about obesity. We need to make clear that eating regular meals is vital - and that a proper breakfast is very important. "If you eat well first thing, you'll feel brighter, you'll have more get up and go - and that will mean you'll expend more energy."

Teenagers are not the only ones who may benefit from sitting down to a proper breakfast. In a study of nearly 7,000 middle-aged people in Norfolk, a team from Cambridge University found that those who ate the most in the morning put on the least amount of weight.

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Teens Who Eat Breakfast Daily Eat Healthier Diets Than Those Who Skip Breakfast ScienceDaily,

University of Minnesota School of Public Health Project Eating Among Teens (EAT) researchers have found further evidence to support the importance of encouraging youth to eat breakfast regularly. Researchers examined the association between breakfast frequency and five-year body weight change in more than 2,200 adolescents, and the results indicate that daily breakfast eaters consumed a healthier diet and were more physically active than breakfast skippers during adolescence.

Five years later, the daily breakfast eaters also tended to gain less weight and have lower body mass index levels -- an indicator of obesity risk -- compared with those who had skipped breakfast as adolescents.

Mark Pereira, Ph.D., corresponding author on the study, points out that this study extends the literature on the topic of breakfast habits and obesity risk because of the size and duration of the study. "The dose-response findings between breakfast frequency and obesity risk, even after taking into account physical activity and other dietary factors, suggests that eating breakfast may have important effects on overall diet and obesity risk, but experimental studies are needed to confirm these observations," he added.

Over the past two decades, rates of obesity have doubled in children and nearly tripled in adolescents. Fifty-seven percent of adolescent females and 33 percent of males frequently use unhealthy weight-control behaviors, and it is estimated that between 12 and 24 percent of children and adolescents regularly skip breakfast. This percentage of breakfast skippers, while alarming, has been found to increase with age.

Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Ph.D., principal investigator of Project EAT, says that this research confirms the importance of teaching adolescents to start the day off 'right' by eating breakfast. "Although adolescents may think that skipping breakfast seems like a good way to save on calories, findings suggest the opposite. Eating a healthy breakfast may help adolescents avoid overeating later in the day and disrupt unhealthy eating patterns, such as not eating early in the day and eating a lot late in the evening."

The study, "Breakfast Eating and Weight Change in a 5-Year Prospective Analysis of Adolescents: Project EAT," will be published in the March edition of *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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