

HEALTH
BUZZTHE BIG
BREAKFAST
MYTHIT'S TIME TO RETHINK ONE
OF THE MOST COMMONLY
CITED HEALTH RULES, SAYS
KATRINA LAWRENCEThe best
breakfast is
a healthy
one – and of
a moderate
portion size.

Early this year, researchers at the University of Munich dished up some disheartening news for dieters who had long heeded – and relished – the common advice to consume a large breakfast. Contrary to popular opinion and previous studies, eating up big in the morning, they said, can actually lead to an increased overall intake of kilojoules.

“The ‘big breakfast’ rule was based on the thinking that you’re more active in the first half of the day and burn more kilojoules,” says dietitian Susie Burrell. “So if you have a big breakfast, it was said you’ll be less likely to snack throughout the day and hence help control your kilojoule intake.” Burrell speculates the theory has come undone because we’re simply not compensating with lighter lunches and dinners. “Most people continue to have a large lunch and dinner to go with a large breakfast because they’re used to such portion sizes,” she says. “So a big breakfast effectively programs you to eat bigger portions than you require. You get used to overeating, both physiologically and psychologically.”

Another contributing factor to this process, says dietitian Marieke Rodenstein, is that the actual breakfast that we eat is changing. “The research

[in the study] only looked at kilojoules but the fact is, not all kilojoules are created equal,” she says. “Kilojoules from fat and protein can evoke entirely different physiological responses than kilojoules from carbohydrates.” And processed carbohydrates are increasingly found on breakfast plates. “Sugary cereals, white bread and juice in large quantities have significant effects on weight gain.”

So what is the right breakfast? If you’re talking purely in terms of kilojoules, Rodenstein nominates 1460-2000kJ as the aim. Burrell, however, adds that if you have morning tea, breakfast should clock in at 800-1250kJ. (“Enough to keep you full for a couple of hours.”) As mentioned, however, it’s about quality at least as much as quantity. Rodenstein’s top breakfast recommendations are an omelette with vegetables, two poached eggs on a slice of wholegrain sourdough bread served with a side of avocado and tomato, or a bowl

of bircher muesli topped with nuts, seeds, yoghurt and berries.

“A recent study found that fat is a really important nutrient to have at breakfast because you actually program your metabolism for the rest of the day to burn fat,” explains Rodenstein, who recommends salmon along with eggs (“Especially great for making you feel full and satisfied”), nuts and yoghurt. “However, eating a carb-rich meal first – as most of us do – seems to fix your metabolism towards using carbs for energy so it impairs your body’s ability to burn fat later in the day.”

Whatever you eat, you should still adhere to the old adage of eating like a king at breakfast and a pauper at dinner, says Burrell. “Dinner is when you should keep it light with protein and vegetables,” she says. Burrell adds that the trend for eating breakfast out could be one part of today’s obesity puzzle. “If you do go and overeat at breakfast, balance it out by eating light food for the rest of the day, such as soup and salad.”

Finally, one golden breakfast rule still stands true: never skip it. “Breakfast kickstarts your metabolism for the day,” says Burrell. “You cannot optimise your metabolic function or control your weight long-term if you don’t eat breakfast.”

RODENSTEIN'S TOP BREAKFAST RECOMMENDATIONS

An
omelette
with
vegetables
and greens.Two poached
eggs with
spinach on
a slice of
wholegrain
sourdough
bread.A bowl of
bircher
muesli
topped with
nuts, seeds,
yoghurt and
berries.