

Start Smart with Breakfast

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Prudent decision making is important on the cusp of a new day, Naperville dietitian and writer **Christine Palumbo** said.

"Breakfast can contribute numerous health benefits. And the primary one, which seems counter-intuitive, is that breakfast helps beat the bulge," she said. "Numerous studies suggest that eating early in the day reduces the calories we eat at later meals."

Palumbo said a British research team found that skipping breakfast for two weeks leads to higher low-density lipoprotein ("bad" cholesterol) and hikes insulin levels, which can lead to type II diabetes.

But don't rush for the tall stack of pancakes with a side of sausage. The ideal breakfast should include some whole grain, lean protein and fruit - which furnishes various antioxidants, depending on which variety is chosen.

The quickly digested carbohydrates, antioxidants and other nutrients in fruit give the body an eye-opening boost, but it also needs protein and fiber to feel sated.

"A lot of people, particularly women, don't naturally go toward a source of protein at breakfast," Palumbo said. "It seems as if a carbohydrate and coffee go together in the morning."

Whole-grain carbohydrates are necessary, since the simple carbs in breadstuffs based on refined white flour enter the bloodstream fast and bring hunger back faster.

"A source of protein is going to slow that," said Palumbo, whose favorite choice is eggs. "Numerous studies have found that an egg at breakfast contributes to weight loss."

And while an egg white-only breakfast cuts the meal's dietary cholesterol count, it also removes assorted vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, she said.

Most restaurants will make a one- or two-egg omelet if the customer asks for it, and there are nutritional boosts that can be tucked inside it.

"Even if it's not listed on the menu, you can ask for onions, red pepper, green pepper, spinach, tomato," said Palumbo, who also suggests a light sprinkling of cheese in place of a big, melty stuffing.

- *Susan Frick Carlman*