

# The Breakfast Ritual

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## “The Breakfast Ritual”

### **Abstract**

This qualitative research study is focused on breakfast or a morning meal. The importance of a good start to your day has always been encouraged by manufacturers whose focus has been set on selling breakfast items. The objective of this paper is to learn why or why not breakfast is significant; and if the choice was being made, what is the deciding factor? The age group for this research was specifically selected with the intention of focusing on those who are no longer living with parents. Parents often influence many decisions and choices made by adolescents, and I didn't want this factor to influence the research.

Four participants were chosen based on age and gender, and interviewed about how they started each morning and whether or not it included a morning meal. Of the participants that were selected, three of the four ate breakfast regularly. Some participants ate for medical reasons, to provide energy for physically demanding jobs, and some ate due to routine that parents had ingrained in them. The participant who chose not to eat did so out of a lack of time and because they do not feel hungry upon waking and usually only eat two meals a day. I learned through this study that everyone has a different reason as to why they choose to eat or not to eat breakfast. However, I also learned that on average, 75% of those interviewed do take the time and make the conscious effort to consume a morning meal.

### **Introduction**

People have always said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but is that really true? As we look at trends that relate to food, and diet patterns of those living in America,

we see a strange statistic. People tend to “skip” breakfast for various reasons; this would lead me to believe that breakfast cannot possibly be that important. Or can it? According to Margaretha Haugen of “Changes in Dietary Pattern...” she states that “Whether it features soup in Vietnam, biscotti in Italy, or scrambled eggs in the United States, breakfast revs up the body after a night’s sleep, giving us energy and nutrients to face the day. Studies suggest that eating breakfast regularly is associated with good health—and that the timing of the meal, as well as what’s in it, matters.” (Haugen.) If breakfast truly is important, why don’t we spend more time preparing and cooking it? Breakfast seems like an afterthought; driving down the street on a Monday morning only seems to prove this theory. Drive thru windows are bumper to bumper with those rushing to grab coffee, tea, a morning muffin or hot oatmeal to take to work.

One of the interviewed participants shared an interesting insight as to why breakfast is important and should be consumed every day. The article on “Breaking the Fast” is from the Harvard Health Letter, Harvard’s Journal of Health. It shares the importance of eating a meal first thing in the morning; commonly called “Breakfast” and how it breaks our overnight fast, raises our low blood glucose and gives us the energy we need to begin another productive day. My participant shared that very same information with me and let me know that this is why they feel the conviction to eat breakfast, a morning meal, or to just eat something to help their body get up and go.

The article raises health issues as to what can happen if breakfast is continually skipped, and the dangers that arise. Many of these negative consequences include lower blood glucose, feeling anxious, a slowing of metabolism, and even increased calorie consumption throughout the rest of the day. According to the Nutrition Journal, “Evidence suggests that breakfast consumption and food habits have an impact on cognitive function and school performance

among school children.” (JADA.) This would lead me believe that eating breakfast not only affects “school-age children” but teenagers and adults for that matter too.

## **Literature Review**

In preparation for this research study on the breakfast ritual, I reviewed several papers on breakfast habits of those from all over the world. Breakfast literally meaning "breaking the fast" of the night is the first meal taken after rising from a night's sleep, most often eaten in the early morning before undertaking the day's work. In the United States we refer to this first meal as Breakfast, and for those enjoying a lazy Saturday or Sunday morning; this is referred to as Brunch.

Breakfast foods vary widely from place to place, but often include a carbohydrate such as grains or cereals, fruit and or a vegetable, a protein food such as eggs, meat or fish, and a beverage such as tea, coffee, milk or some form of a fruit juice or fruit juice cocktail. Coffee, tea, juice, milk, breakfast cereals, pancakes, sausages, bacon, sweet breads, fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, muffins, and toast with butter or margarine and or jam or marmalade are common examples of breakfast foods, though a large range of preparations and ingredients are associated with breakfast globally. What helps to determine the ingredient used depends on social influence, time, and money, as well as availability of fresh and local food.

Other studies have linked healthy breakfasts with less chronic disease, increased longevity and better health. Starting your day with a good breakfast or any morning meal will boost your energy, increases your attention span, and heightens your sense of well-being. A morning meal should be well-balanced, have some form of carbohydrate, protein, fruit and or vegetable. In fact, breakfasts should account for one-third of your daily nutrient needs.

## **Methods**

For my research topic, I have chosen to interview four individuals who differ in age and gender in order to give me a better perspective of those who choose to eat a morning meal. Those who I interviewed range from 18 years of age to 35 years of age. Each interview was conducted at a different time and date, and the series of questions asked were the same for each participant. The interviews lasted from 15-35 minutes in duration and were conducted in the same way. All four participants had volunteered to participate, knowing what the subject matter would be, and from the volunteers I selected four participants. Two of the participants were men, and the other two were women, all four fell within the age requirement, and they did not live with parents.

I prepared a series of questions to find out if they think eating breakfast is important. I asked that if they eat breakfast on a regular basis, and if so why? I also asked what breakfast or morning meals consist of, and how or where the meal is prepared and eaten. I was curious to learn is time, effort, and planning ahead went into the everyday morning meal, or if indeed this meal is a mere afterthought. I wanted to learn if these individuals choose not to eat breakfast, and if they make the conscious decision not to, or do they simply “not have time.” These four participants were selected by myself and are friends, colleagues, and or family member. All of the participants volunteered for this research study, making this a simple random sample; specifically chose people who worked, and or attend school. My intention was to interview people in dissimilar stages of life that would have some kind of different and unique perspective to add to my research.

By interviewing these individuals I was able to gain some insight as to why we skimp over the most important meal of the day in trade for a cup of coffee or doughnut from the mini-mart. The reasons the participants chose to skip the meal or to consume it was vital to my

understanding of why so many people go without breakfast. I was curious to learn what breakfast consists of if eaten, or if it is replaced with a larger meal later in the day, or supplemented by a beverage. I was able to learn that if meals were skipped it was either a matter of not having enough time, or done in an effort to save calories. However, I learned that participants have other reasons to eat a meal, such as medical purposes.

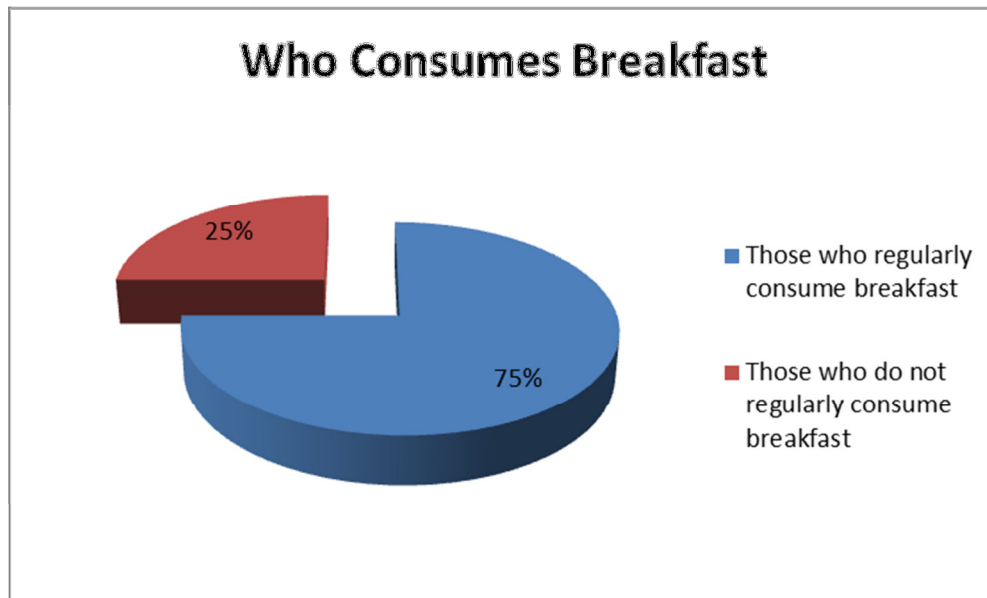
“There’s some physiology to it — eating breakfast prevents you from bottoming out and getting too hungry,” explains Susan Kraus, MS, RD, at the Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. “Psychologically, you know you started the day off right. When eating breakfast becomes part of your regimen, you start having ownership of it, become more consistent, and feel that you’re making a change for the better. Nutritionally, when you have breakfast, there’s more of a guarantee that you’re getting the nutrients you need every day.”

One of my participants who eats a morning meal every day alluded to this research stating that they have to eat, because it is important and gives them the energy that they need. Another participant who regularly skips this meal alluded to the same fact, saying that when time and effort is made to eat, he has more energy and “feels better” through the day. “Without eating breakfast, you’re more vulnerable to cravings and less likely to make healthy choices in the morning and throughout the day,” says Kraus. That’s a disaster — whether you’re on a diet or just eating for good health.

## **Results**

After interviewing my four research participants, I quickly began to see patterns emerging. Three out of four participants consume breakfast or a morning meal on a regular basis.

Those who eat breakfast and those who choose not to, or claim not to have time are represented in this pie chart below.



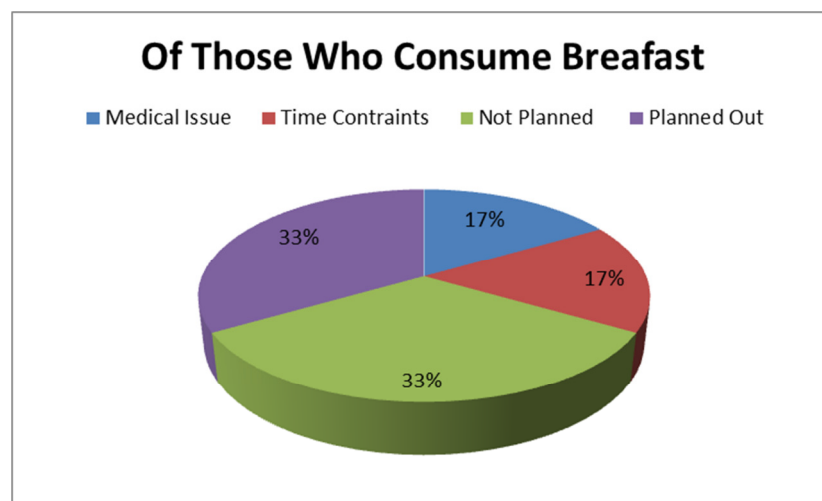
Of those who ate breakfast; two participants claimed that they not only make the time to eat, but they generally plan ahead. By planning ahead participants B and C plan out what is to be consumed, they shop for the ingredients and make time in the morning to cook or prepare the meal. The other participant, participant A; claimed that she doesn't always have time to plan and prepare but she does make time to eat. Whether the meal consists of leftovers from the day before, or a muffin grabbed on the way out the door she makes time to eat. Participant D is the 25% of society that is represented and known for skipping the morning meal. Participant D claims that the meal is most often missed due to a lack of physical hunger as well as a time constraint.

Participant D; and those who chose not to eat breakfast or a morning meal, may do so for various reasons. Using a matrix I was able to see the data and answers to various interview questions side by side. As seen below, each participant was asked a series of questions about the frequency, importance, reasons, constraints, and the planning of morning meals. After creating the matrix, it was important to separate out the reasons participants had for consuming breakfast.

Breakfast Consumption Matrix				
	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
How Often in 7 days is a Morning Meal Consumed	7 days; everyday	7days; everyday	7 days; everyday	rarely; maybe once a week
Is this meal important?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Medical Reasons for Morning Meal?	Yes; HAVE to eat	No	No	No
Is time constraint a factor for your choice of eating?	No; time isn't a factor.	No; I make time.	No; breakfast very important.	Yes; I never have time.
Is the meal planned out ahead of time?	No	Yes	Yes	No
Is this meal skipped? Yes, No, Often, Rarely	No - Never.	Rarely.	No - Never.	Yes - Often.

With three out of four participants choosing to plan ahead, and make the time to eat a morning meal, the comparison as to why this was done began. By using a pie chart, it was simple better see who consumes a morning meal for what reason. Another aspect of this research was to ask what a typical weekday and weekend morning meal consisted of. By asking this question we can better see how well thought out and planned these meals are. Does the breakfast consist of a sugary breakfast cereal and juice or is toast and eggs made? By asking each participant about their unique morning meals and routines I was better able to understand the choices made by each participant.

Participant D who chooses to skip six out of seven morning meals in a typical week claimed to do so due to not feeling hungry. However, when I asked him about the time he does eat a morning meal the participant stated that he is more likely to go so during a weekend when work and time isn't an issue. This lead me to believe that the participant may actually be hungry, but rather ignores the hunger cues and work until the lunch hour .



Two of the four participants brought an interesting perspective into this research that I hadn't considered. The idea of how breakfast makes you feel, or how it may physically aid you through the day was a factor for participants A and C. Participant A tends to be hypoglycemic; causing her to feel weak and shaky when she goes for too long without a meal or snack. For this reason she believes that consuming breakfast every morning keeps her blood sugar from dropping too low. Participant A claimed over and over during the interview that breakfast is a must for her, and skipping the meal is simply out of the question, and could be medically harmful to her. Participant C stated that if he goes too long in between meals he begins to notice a change in his temperament. He believes that if he goes too long without food he becomes

“cranky” and “irritable”, and as end result he then becomes overly hungry. In order to prevent this from happening he not only makes time to eat a morning meal, but he also packs a lunch and snacks for his long work day. Being able to interview four different participants and gain four different perspectives helped me to better understand those who will make time for a morning meal, and those who chose to skip it all together.

## **Discussion**

Most people give a variety of reasons for not eating breakfast. A common reason is that they are not hungry in the morning, which often is the result of eating a large meal late in the evening or late night snacking. When they go to bed, their body is still busy digesting all of the food that was consumed. Digestion then goes into a slower gear during the hours of sleep and there is still food in the stomach in the morning. When you get up in the morning, your blood glucose or blood sugar level will be at its lowest point in the day. Glucose is the basic fuel for the body; it directly affects the brain and central nervous system. A good breakfast will keep you from being tired and irritable by mid-morning and give you the energy that you need to perform daily tasks. Eating breakfast gives you a mental advantage. When you start off your day, your body needs fuel. “Glycogen stores start to deplete. If you haven’t had any food, by lunch you’ll start to feel fatigued,” says Kraus, adding that cognitive studies, particularly on children, tell us what happens if you don’t eat — you lose focus and concentration as well as the ability to think and problem-solve.

The effects of a skipped breakfast are short attention span, lack of attentiveness, low blood sugar, and decreased work productivity. Surely breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and it is the breaking of the fast. Take time to plan, prepare and eat a well-balanced

breakfast. I believe that once you get into the routine of eating breakfast, you may begin to feel the positive effects of a morning meal and begin to make this a priority. Nutritional experts have denoted breakfast as the most important meal of the day, and I couldn't agree more.

## References

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## Interview Guide

“You are being asked to participate in an oral interview in which you can either agree to, or disagree too. These questions are for the purpose of a study about the idea of a Breakfast Ritual. Please answer these questions honestly and truthfully to the best of your knowledge. Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answers, and you may stop the interview at any point in time.”

1. How often, in the span of a 7 day week do you consume breakfast or a morning meal?
2. Is this fairly standard for you, or was this week an exception?
  - a. Holiday/Birthday/Special Event
3. Why do you choose to eat or not eat?
  - a. Importance/Time constraint/Medical condition
4. Do you feel that breakfast is an important part of the day and why?
5. If you eat breakfast, what does it normally consist of?
  - a. Is that common?
  - b. Do weekday and weekend breakfast meals differ, and how so?
6. Is the meal planned out?
  - a. On the go/Made at home/Taken to go
7. If you skip breakfast as a meal, why do you choose to do this?
  - a. Calorie saving/time issue