



Emily Troscianko

## Investigating breakfast

**W**hat is breakfast for you? Is it a rushed bowl of cereal or slice of toast before you run out the door, or a banana when you get to work? Is it a cornerstone of your morning, something you look forward to when you wake up and then enjoy cooking and sitting down to? Is it a meal that serves crucial functions for you, whether in rebuilding good eating habits or keeping your digestion happy or giving you some reliable time with your child(ren)? Or is it something you haven't had for years, except occasionally at weekends when there are friends to have brunch or a fry-up with? Whatever it is, breakfast probably has some distinct associations for you, maybe different ones for weekdays versus weekends or holidays, but all of them probably also quite different from those of other meals. In this lesson, we'll explore what breakfast is and does for you now before asking whether it could do any of what it does better, or maybe be something new and valuable for you.

**B**efore we go any further, turn to the worksheet to complete the 10 statements you'll find there.

**S**o, what you have now is the basic outline of a bridge from now to something (even) better. Now it's time to build out from the frame we have here.

Let's get into the details, which is always where the fun is. Here are the main breakfast factors that need taking into account. You'll recognise them from those we've taken into account elsewhere already.

**Y**ou can use the worksheet to make notes on each of the 4 factors while you listen, if you like, or at the end of this section.

**R**elative time, aka place in your sequence. What does breakfast come before and after? Why? If it needs to come before or after something else (maybe something that requires physical energy and/or mental focus), be specific. If you know you have a tendency to defer eating in the morning, for example, do you want to counteract this? What would change if you moved this meal forward or back in your routine?

**D**uration. How much time do you want and are you able to carve out for making breakfast and eating it? If the immediate number you come to is very small (e.g. I can't possibly give it more than five minutes), is it accurate? If you want, consider what you'd do if eating well at breakfast time were your top morning priority. This may give you some options to consider for how to make a bit more space



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for it. But also don't overestimate how much time you need to make something great. Lots of classic breakfast options are extremely quick and easy to cook (see my Top Tips for more on the joys of eggs).

**C**ompany. Do you tend to have breakfast with anyone else? If you don't, would you like to, and if you do, do you want to continue to?

What are the pros and cons for you of eating with other people at this time of day? You probably have some choice in the matter, though if really not, of course you can skip this. Maybe having another person or other people with you while you eat helps you wake up or plan for the day ahead; maybe you'd rather have some time to yourself to read or listen to the radio or just enjoy the food and your thoughts. Maybe you and someone else can take turns preparing and clearing up, to make it all quicker. If food is tricky for you in any way, maybe someone else's presence could be calming, or a good example to follow, or just a nice distraction. If so, remember that you could get this on a video call as well as in person. So, what's your ideal to try out here?

**I**ngredients (we've had morning ingredients, but here we get even more literal with the food and drink type). What we ingest at breakfast is, as the name reminds us, what we're eating after the longest fast in the 24-hour period. (There are some exceptions that involve eating at

night for some reason, whether because you're a powerlifter obsessed with 3 am protein shakes [I loved finding out that setting an alarm for this is a thing for some very committed lifters!] or because you often wake up hungry and get a snack to help yourself fall back to sleep, for example.) What you choose here will set the tone for the day. It will determine how your metabolic rate adjusts from the sleep phase. It will kick off the rhythms of your hunger and satiety for the day. It will be a large part of the difference between you feeling sluggish or energized, strong or weak, alert or sleepy, distracted or present, well-nourished or deprived in narrow and broader senses, throughout this day that you're just beginning. And although dietary science can give us some pointers, the implementation has to be about you.

**F**or instance, although we know that carbs with a low glycaemic index (GI) rating (like wholewheat bread) release energy more slowly and so elevate blood sugar more gently than their higher-GI counterparts (like white bread), how the biochemistry actually plays out in your day is something you have to assess, and possibly test out, for yourself. Maybe you want a quick injection of energy for something physically or mentally demanding early on, or maybe the slow trickle is optimal for keeping you fuelled until lunch; maybe you want some kind of mixture. Similarly with a menu that includes higher or lower proportions of protein, fat, or carbohydrate gener-



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ally—all kinds of details are known (though some crucial ones also still not known) about metabolic and hormonal responses to different macronutrient combinations, but that doesn't necessarily tell us much at all about your body's specific adaptations, your day's specific requirements, your own personal preferences when it comes to preparation and cost and ethics and speed and flavour and satiety and all the rest. You may have a clear sense of specific items you want to rule out or make non-negotiable, or there may be things you haven't tried (for a while or ever) but would like to. If so, take these instincts seriously. In this context it's also worth bearing in mind the preconceptions you may be operating with when it comes to certain types of food being "good" and "bad". Dietary fat is a big one here. As far as I can tell from my reading of the dietary science, the evidence that saturated fat is bad typically comes from studies that are incapable of separating out saturated fat consumption from other behaviours known to increase health risks. My sense is that most people's diets could be made more functional for them (especially by promoting lasting satiety) by upending this damaging dietary dogma and increasing the ratio of fat to everything else. If you're interested, I've written about why to eat more fat in the eating disorder recovery context here??, and I think many of the basic principles apply more broadly.

So, now we've covered the four main factors, let's take a look back at what you want breakfast to be this month. You should also refer back to your MVI too. If you specified anything about any of these practical details in either or both of these formats, great, work with these. If not, you can simply start from your statement: For the coming month, I want breakfast to be...

**W**hat choices fit well with the global aim you've articulated for yourself, and/or align well with any details you already know matter? Turn back to the worksheet for the next step.

**A**s I mentioned, you can also see my top tips for a couple of breakfast-relevant items informed by my own (apparently rather idiosyncratic!) take on breakfast.

**S**o now you have a breakfast blueprint. How does it strike you?

**F**inally, it's worth returning to the dimensions we worked with for your entire morning earlier. Here the Anticipation, Intrinsic enjoyment, Replicability, and Deliberateness dimensions are probably relevant; Substantiveness may be (e.g. if you're dealing with an eating disorder or any other health problem where



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food is important). Getting your day started definitely is.

**S**o turn back to the worksheet one last time to assess what you have and improve it further if you need.