

Top off breakfast with -- chocolate cake?

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When it comes to diets, cookies and cake are off the menu. Now, in a surprising discovery, researchers from Tel Aviv University have found that dessert, as part of a balanced 600-calorie breakfast that also includes proteins and carbohydrates, can help dieters to lose more weight — and keep it off in the long run.

The key is to indulge in the morning, when the body's metabolism is at its most active and we are better able to work off the extra calories throughout the day, say Prof. Daniela Jakubowicz, Dr. Julio Wainstein and Dr. Mona Boaz of Tel Aviv University's Sackler Faculty of Medicine and the Diabetes Unit at Wolfson Medical Center, and Prof. Oren Froy of Hebrew University Jerusalem.

Attempting to avoid sweets entirely can create a psychological addiction to these same foods in the long-term, explains Prof. Jakubowicz. Adding dessert items to breakfast can control cravings throughout the rest of the day. Over the course of a 32 week-long study, detailed in the journal *Steroids*, participants who added dessert to their breakfast — cookies, cake, or chocolate — lost an average of 40 lbs. more than a group that avoided such foods. What's more, they kept off the pounds longer.

The scale tells the tale

A meal in the morning provides energy for the day's tasks, aids in brain functioning, and kick-starts the body's metabolism, making it crucial for weight loss and maintenance. And breakfast is the meal that most successfully regulates ghrelin, the hormone that increases hunger,

explains Prof. Jakubowicz. While the level of ghrelin rises before every meal, it is suppressed most effectively at breakfast time.

Basing their study on this fact, the researchers hoped to determine whether meal time and composition impacted weight loss in the short and long term, says Prof. Jakubowicz, or if it was a simple matter of calorie count.

One hundred and ninety three clinically obese, non-diabetic adults were randomly assigned to one of two diet groups with identical caloric intake — the men consumed 1600 calories per day and the women 1400. However, the first group was given a low carbohydrate diet including a small 300 calorie breakfast, and the second was given a 600 calorie breakfast high in [protein](#) and carbohydrates, always including a dessert item (i.e. chocolate).

Halfway through the study, participants in both groups had lost an average of 33 lbs. per person. But in the second half of the study, results differed drastically. The participants in the low-carbohydrate group regained an average of 22 lbs. per person, but participants in the group with a larger breakfast lost another 15 lbs. each. At the end of the 32 weeks, those who had consumed a 600 calorie breakfast had lost an average of 40 lbs. more per person than their peers.

Realistic in the long run

One of the biggest challenges that people face is keeping weight off in the long-term, says Prof. Jakubowicz. Ingesting a higher proportion of our daily calories at breakfast makes sense. It's not only good for body function, but it also alleviates cravings. Highly restrictive diets that forbid desserts and carbohydrates are initially effective, but often cause [dieters](#) to stray from their food plans as a result of withdrawal-like symptoms. They wind up regaining much of the weight they lost during

the diet proper.

Though they consumed the same daily amount of calories, "the participants in the low [carbohydrate](#) diet group had less satisfaction, and felt that they were not full," she says, noting that their cravings for sugars and carbohydrates were more intense and eventually caused them to cheat on the diet plan. "But the group that consumed a bigger breakfast, including dessert, experienced few if any cravings for these foods later in the day."

Ultimately, this shows that a [diet](#) must be realistic to be adopted as part of a new lifestyle. Curbing cravings is better than deprivation for [weight loss](#) success, Prof. Jakubowicz concludes.

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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