

[IMAGE]

When and How To Eat

By Lois Orth-Zitoli and Ben Benjamin, PhD

Let's talk about "when to eat." Humans have an internal rhythm that mimics the cycles of nature. Known as circadian rhythms, these patterns of physiological functioning repeat every 24 hours. For example, when you sleep at night, your blood pressure, heart rate, and body temperature decrease. In the morning your body temperature naturally rises to prepare you for a metabolic resurgence. So, how do you fire up your metabolism? Perhaps you decide to drink two cups of coffee for a morning boost and skip breakfast thinking it might help you to lose a little weight? How many of you reading this article have tried skipping meals in an attempt to lose weight? Were you disappointed with the lack of results? That's because your body gets confused when you don't eat. You are sending your body the message that no food is available so it had better start storing fat for the hard times ahead.

If you are reading this and thinking, "I'm not hungry in the morning," the next question is "Do you drink coffee in the morning before eating?" If the answer is yes, try waiting 30 minutes to start your coffee ritual in the morning. You may find that your appetite for breakfast returns. You may even find that without the coffee, which is an appetite suppressant, you are maybe even ravenous in the morning. If you want sustained energy all day, you must eat. Ideally, your breakfast will contain protein and unsaturated fat. Eating an all-carbohydrate breakfast or skipping breakfast entirely will set you up for cravings later in the day.

apples - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark If our goal is to feel naturally energized during every waking minute of each day, if we follow our circadian rhythms closely, we will experience a greater energetic flow. For example, our muscles tend to gain more strength during the morning hours between 6:00am to 10:00am. This is the perfect time of day to exercise and, of course, our breakfast fuel supports this natural process. Then, between the hours of 10:00am to 2:00pm, our digestive functions get stronger and metabolism reaches its peak. Like nature, when the sun is highest in the sky, our body temperature is at its highest point of the day. This is when your body digests foods and burns fuel most efficiently. So, it is best not to waste your peak metabolic opportunity of the day by failing to schedule at least 30 minutes to eat lunch. From 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM, our parasympathetic nervous system is activated. This is the best time of the day for heavier mental activity and less physical activity (which can be impeded if you are crashing from

too much coffee and carbohydrate intake at breakfast and lunch).

The second best time of the day to exercise falls between the hours of 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM. However, because the body's metabolic processes have already started to slow down for an evening of rest, a less vigorous form of exercise should be chosen. You might also recognize these hours as prime dinner time. But based on what you now know about the daily cycles of nature, when do you think the largest meal of the day should be eaten? If you said "Lunch", you would be correct.

From 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM, your body moves into its liver cleansing cycle. This is the second time of day when metabolic activity increases. During this time the goal is to clean the blood and repair damaged tissue. We have all heard it said that going to bed with a full stomach, beyond the obvious discomfort, is bad for you. What's so bad about it? If you eat a big meal late in the day, your body must spend its important internal cleansing time doing the work of digestion. If you are living along with the cycles of nature, all is quiet and you are resting peacefully.

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