

Missing breakfast is a topic I felt would never have to be discussed, especially among athletes. It was just assumed, athletes knew their bodies better than anyone else and the nutritional needs which had to be met to compete. However, I was sadly mistaken. It turns out an estimated 52 percent of Americans skip eating breakfast each day. Until I started speaking to teams, I never gave it much thought. Since my sons were involved in sports, one a baseball player, and the other a swimmer, I thought it best to cover the topic.

During my discussions with various teams, I found the majority did indeed miss breakfast. The athletic teams mirrored the rest of the country with a little over half admitting guilt. The worst offender was by far: Girls Track and Field. In my experience with a few of these groups, I noted an average of 90 percent missed breakfast every day. I was stunned. These girls were extremely thin and had a definite fear and misconception about eating. I asked them why they did not eat breakfast. Here are the most popular answers:

No time

Thought it would slow them down and make them gain weight

Inconvenient

I specifically asked them about time. They usually awoke around 5:30 a.m. which I thought ample time to eat breakfast. Not so. The majority stated it took time to get ready and especially fix their hair. Fair enough.

When asked how they felt around 10:00 a.m., all said they were “famished, starving, and miserable.”

I do not mean to single out this one particular group, but they do lend themselves readily to be examined. I am interested in all athletes, but I do want the females to especially be aware of this. I think many of them bordered on having an eating disorder, but that is another article. When you miss breakfast, your body suffers in many ways. You don't get enough minerals and vitamins. The United States Department of Agriculture reported there were three main components to a skipped breakfast which are vital to good health: Protein, Iron, and Vitamin C.

Missing breakfast leads to obesity, because when people do so, they tend to snack during the rest of the day. Excessive calories are simply stored as fat. These so called “empty calories,” lead to other problems, too. Trans fat, cholesterol, increased sugar, sodium, and fat lead to diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Studies have also shown when people miss breakfast they have decreased athletic and academic performance. No wonder. If you don't fuel your body properly, it simply won't respond to its highest levels.

Now, let's go to our case study of the day: Lacy L.

Lacy was a 19 year old female who ran cross country track for her college team. One day, she was running after school, when she felt a very sharp pain in her knee. The pain was so severe; it knocked her to the ground. She had to be picked up where she fell and was then taken to the hospital.

During the patient's history, she admitted to skipping breakfast, and not eating much during the day. Her day consisted of going to school, running, and this was followed by a “light supper.” While running on this particular day, she was moving at a fairly rapid pace. All of a sudden, she felt a terrible sharp pain, as if “I had been shot.” She went down, tried to get back up, but the pain was too great.

On physical examination, she was thin, anemic, and in severe pain. Her knee was swollen and tender upon manipulation.

Her lab values were of particular interest:

She had a low Hemoglobin/Hematocrit, as well as serum Iron and Calcium levels. She was also deficient in Vitamin D.

X-rays confirmed our diagnosis: tibial plateau fracture

This is a fracture of the tibia, which is the large bone below your knee joint. If you get kicked in your shin, this is the tibia. This particular fracture involved her knee joint. It appeared stable and not displaced. Because of this, she was treated non-operatively. However, it is a very serious fracture.

She was anemic with low serum calcium. Her fracture was the immediate problem, but her poor nutrition was the major contributing factor. This is not uncommonly seen. This is why I stress patients to strive for nutritional balance, especially athletes.

This is also why I recommend athletes get a thorough check up and examination before competing, which could and many times, should include a baseline set of laboratory values. Estimates show a very high percentage of female athletes are deficient in calcium and iron. This, as you see, may lead to injury and illness. I don't want to panic parents, but everyone needs to be aware of the fact. If you don't eat healthy foods and have nutritional balance in your life, you are at increased risk for the same problems seen in this case.

Lacy did not continue to run competitively. However, with the proper nutritional counseling, her physical condition improved significantly.

The reason I brought this case to your attention is because it is one which is directly related to poor nutrition. A fracture across the joint space resulted due to a poor diet, and it ended this athlete's career.

This is one reason I made my Pro Bites in French toast flavor. I don't want to see anyone ever miss breakfast, again. The product is a great source of protein, and a good source of iron. Couple it with juice, and you at least have a good start on the day. It is also heat stable, convenient, and ready to eat. I do not mean for this to be your entire meal, but it should be included in your everyday diet, because it provides some of the nutrients athletes simply must have to compete.

Don't shortchange yourself during the day. Always remember this; Take great care of your body, and it will take great care of you, especially when put under the stress of being you sick or competing in sports activities.

You are now officially out of excuses, so please don't ever miss breakfast again.

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Dr. Steven Snodgrass is a board-certified surgeon, a member of the American Medical Association, a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons and Chief Executive Officer of Peak Performance Foods.

His new product, Dr. Steve's Pro-Bites, was made for people who care about their bodies and want the best quality food they can eat. He understands how hard it is for you and your parents to get up every morning and go to work and school. Many times, people don't eat because they are in a hurry. Don't do that, because it hurts your body. He made Pro-Bites so you could pop open a bag and go!

Dr. Steven Snodgrass works with athletes and patients to help them meet their special physical and nutritional needs.

Please give Dr. Steve's Pro Bites a try to see for yourself.

Thank you.

Steven L. Snodgrass, M.D., F.A.C.S.