# Meal timing - how often should you eat?

*“Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper.“*

Meal timing might be one of the most important yet simplest things one can do to improve one's metabolism. If nothing else, take this one thing with you from this course and use it; it WILL change your health and body for the better.

So, what do we mean by meal timing? It is basically how often, at what times, and how regularly you eat. You might have heard things like:

* Breakfast is the most important meal of the day
* You have to eat 3, 4, 5 times a day
* Don’t eat after 6 o’clock

How much of this is fluff? What works? How do you use meal timing to improve your metabolism and natural fat-burning ability? Let’s forget the myths and take a look at what science has to say about this.

The most important thing, 80% of meal timing importance, is regularity. This is the thing that might be the most crucial part of fixing your eating habits and getting healthy. Of course, you can eat regularly and unhealthily. A typical example is people who eat very little and randomly throughout the working day and then regularly overeat in the evenings. But we're not talking about random regularity, but planned regularity. If you are eating four times a day - at 7 am, 12 pm, 4 pm, and 8 pm - you should do it every single day throughout the year, and you shouldn't diverge from this. This is the foundation of healthy nutrition and eating habits. It has so many benefits.

First of all - our metabolism functions by our inner 24-hour clock. It needs regularity. When we offer it regular meal times, it can prepare and function 100% when we eat.

Secondly, studies have shown that people who eat regularly, even unhealthy food, have a much smaller tendency to overeat. When you don’t offer your metabolism energy regularly, it overcompensates by overeating when it has a chance. It is a normal evolutionary self-preservation mechanism.

Thirdly - when you eat regularly, there is a much bigger chance that you know what you will be eating, preventing you from overeating or eating whatever comes into view. People who eat randomly throughout the day get fast food or groceries much more often than people who know where and what they will be eating tomorrow at lunch. Those people have their meals prepared or some specific eating place planned.

So make this one of your priorities to start eating regularly, even if you eat too much or unhealthy food. It WILL start to bear fruit by some point.

As for your metabolism, there is a fundamental principle that you should know. It is eating more of your calories at the beginning of the day. This is where all the breakfast sayings and mantras come from, although without understanding the science behind it.

Studies show that the same amount of calories in the morning will boost your metabolism much more than the same calories in the evening. In one study, scientists compared two groups of overweight women. Both were given the same diet and calories. But the twist was that one ate most of their calories in the first half of the day and the second one by the second half of the day. The first group lost weight while the second one didn't. They estimated that the difference between the two groups was 200-300 kcal per day! This is an incredible number if you consider that nothing else was different in those two diets.

So whatever you eat, if you eat most of it by the first half of the day, the better the metabolic boost you will get from it. 200 kcal per day will amount to 10.4 kg or 22 pounds of extra fat burnt in a year!

There is also the second significant benefit to eating more of your calories in the first half of a day. This comes down to hormonal mechanisms. Hundreds of studies have shown that people who eat breakfast are much less likely to overeat in the evenings. This mechanism is so robust that it works from day one. Eating little at the beginning of the day causes your hunger and metabolic hormones to overcompensate in the evening and load all the calories into your mouth that you can get your hands on. If you've ever visited your fridge frequently in the evening to snack some more and still not feeling full, it is the same process I'm talking about. Of course, you can still overeat through emotional eating, but not by hormonal mechanisms.

One of the most often used arguments against this suggestion is: "I have no hunger in the mornings." Nobody that has overeaten in the evening before has hunger in the morning. It is a prevalent hormonal response that leads to overeating in the evenings and under eating in the mornings. To test it out and break the cycle, you have to do nothing more than to fast for 1-3 evenings in a row, and just like that - you will be craving for a good breakfast!

This leads us to the third main point of meal timing. This one is not mandatory, but something to think about if you want to maximize your nutrition's metabolic and health effects.

It is intermittent fasting. No, intermittent fasting is not the magical way to turn your metabolism into an automatic fat burner as some claim. It has been shown to burn no more calories than any other diet.

The intermittent fasting benefit comes from autophagy. This is the process where your body's cells break down and use the dysfunctional components inside it. It's like an automated self-cleaning mechanism and is strongly triggered by fasting. The longer the fast, the more powerful autophagy comes. It has lots of health benefits - it lowers inflammation and improves cell function and may even help prevent dementia and cancer.

So how can you use this effect? You don’t have to fast for long periods at a time. It is much simpler than this and here’s where intermittent fasting comes into play. You can get the same benefits from fasting short periods every day. At least 12 hours is recommended, but 14-16 hours is even better. The most common intermittent fasting method is the 8/16 cycle, which means that one eats in an 8 hours time window and fasts for 16 hours every day.

But what about eating often? You've probably heard or even practiced eating every 2-3 hours to "keep your metabolism active." This, unfortunately, has no scientific backing. It has no metabolic effect on how often you eat. It comes down to practicality. For most of us, eating 2-5 times a day is the best way. However, you have to test and find your rhythm.

So, there are three potent ways to improve your metabolism and overall health. If we take all of this together, then there are a couple of suggestions for you:

1. Eat regularly - at the same time every day.
2. The more calories, the earlier in the day you eat, the better the metabolic boost you get.
3. Use intermittent fasting: eat 8-12 hours every day and fast for 12-16 hours.

If nothing else, remember this one thing - regular meal timing might be the most important one thing you could do to improve your health and diet.