

# You are when you eat

**T**here may be several reasons why young children have tantrums. The crayon is the wrong shade of red, the story ended too soon, the sock won't go on. But one of the most important, yet probably most often ignored, reasons is low blood sugar – the child needs to be fed, and NOW. He or she eats something, and suddenly the red is just fine, the story or sock forgotten.

It's not just children who have tantrums when their blood sugar has dropped too low, of course – we adults can be prone to them too, only we are more likely to experience them as 'road rage', 'irritability', or uncontrollable cravings. I believe it's good practice to put yourself on a routine. Get your sleeping and eating patterns regular, and the even moods and good energy levels will follow. Our brains and bodies need a steady supply of fuel, not peaks and troughs. Sometimes what might seem like the highs and lows of life can be the simple need for a snack.

When we eat does not affect just our daily moods, but also our long-term health, thanks in part to our circadian rhythms. The latest research in chronobiology – the study of how organisms adapt to the cycles of the sun and the moon – shows that diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity are all linked with how our eating times accord with our internal clocks, and that when we do things at the 'wrong' times, we pay the price.<sup>1</sup> This effect is so strong that a recent report in the *British*

*Journal of Nutrition* recommended that the nation be given guidelines on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

What this means is that the old adage "Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dine like a pauper" is good advice. Our internal 'master clocks' want us to be eating more in the daytime, less in the evening, and nothing at night – when, ideally, we are sleeping. One slight catch is that we tend not to be so hungry first thing in the morning, due to the activity of our hunger hormones. I find that many people start the day without breakfast as they aren't hungry, but by mid-morning they are overly hungry, living off adrenaline and reaching for a caffeine or sugar fix. This impacts negatively on their blood sugar levels for the rest of the day, leading in the long term to health issues and weight gain. My advice is to wait for an hour or so after waking and then eat a good-sized breakfast.

The 'graze' versus 'gorge' debate comes into play here, too. How many meals should we eat each day, and when? Research suggests that eating frequent smaller meals rather than three large ones reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and aids weight loss.<sup>3,4</sup>

However, constant grazing is not a good idea, as the digestive system needs time to 'clear up' between meals. My advice is to eat three meals daily, plus one or two snacks if you become hungry in between. A big breakfast, lunch, an optional snack and a small dinner seem to work well for most people, and studies seem to support this.<sup>5</sup>

## When to eat – my five top tips:

- Eat three meals daily, plus one or two snacks if hungry.
- Eat more earlier in the day, and less later on.
- Eat during the daytime only.
- Stop eating when you are full, so that you are ready for the next meal at the right time.
- Avoid constant grazing. ●

## References

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