

Big breakfast 'aids weight loss'

Breakfast really could be the most important meal of the day when it comes to losing weight, claims a researcher.

Over several months, obese women who ate half their daily calories first thing fared better than those eating a much smaller amount.

US researcher Dr Daniela Jakubowicz told a San Francisco conference having a small breakfast could actually boost food cravings.

A UK expert said a big breakfast diet might simply be less boring.

Dr Jakubowicz, from Virginia Commonwealth University, has been recommending a hearty breakfast to her patients for 15 years.

She tested it against a low carbohydrate diet in a study of 96 obese and physically inactive women.

This diet involved 1,085 calories a day - the majority of these coming from protein and fat.

Breakfast here was the smallest meal of the day - just 290 calories, with just seven grams of carbohydrates.

Her "big breakfast" diet involved more calories - 1,240 - with a lower proportion of fat and more carbohydrates and protein.

Breakfast here was 610 calories, with 58 grams of carbohydrates, while lunch and dinner were 395 and 235 calories respectively.

Four months on, the low-carb dieters appeared to be doing better, losing an average of 28 pounds to the 23 shed on the "big breakfast" diet.

However, after eight months, the situation had reversed, with the low-carb dieters putting an average of 18 of those pounds back on, while the big breakfasters continued to lose weight, on average 16.5 pounds each.

They lost a fifth of their total body weight on average, compared with less than 5% for the low-carb dieters.

Slower metabolism

Dr Jakubowicz reported that the big breakfasters said they felt less hungry, particularly in the mornings.

She said: "Most weight loss studies have determined that a very low carbohydrate diet is not a good method to reduce weight.



The easy way to lose weight?

“ It could be that it is simply easier for people on a higher-carbohydrate diet to comply with it over a longer period ”

Dr Alex Johnstone
Rowett Research Institute,
Aberdeen

"It exacerbates the craving for carbohydrates and slows metabolism - as a result, after a short period of weight loss, there is a quick return to obesity."

She said that the bigger breakfast helped by making people feel fuller during the day, and was healthier, because it allowed more fibre and fruit to be included.

Dr Alex Johnstone, from the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, said that other studies had shown that while low-carb diets were a "good tool" to reduce weight quickly, they were not a "diet for life".

She said that the regaining of lost weight by these dieters could be more a sign of the relative monotony of the two diets, rather than their ability to necessarily reduce cravings.

"It could be that it is simply easier for people on a higher-carbohydrate diet to comply with it over a longer period."

A spokesman for the British Nutrition Foundation said there was evidence that a good-sized breakfast could help dieters.

She said: "Research shows that eating breakfast can actually help people control their weight.

"This is probably because when we don't have breakfast we're more likely to get hungry before lunch and snack on foods that are high in fat and sugar, such as biscuits, doughnuts or pastries."