Is breakfast the most important meal of the day after all?

By ACSH Staff — August 9, 2013

If you’re one of those people who avoid breakfast in hope of losing weight, perhaps you should think again. Israeli scientists, led by Dr. Daniela Jakubowicz of Tel Aviv University reported in a prospective study that overweight and obese women lost more weight when they consumed more of their daily calories at breakfast than at dinner.

The researchers recruited 96 overweight or obese women with metabolic syndrome for their study. Metabolic syndrome is a composite of abnormal glucose tolerance, hypertension and blood lipid levels, along with abdominal obesity. It’s associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Participants in the study were assigned to one of two groups: One group (BF) consumed more of their daily calories (700) at breakfast than at dinner (200 calories); the other group (D) ate a 200-calorie breakfast and a 700-calorie dinner. Both groups ate 500 calories at lunch, for a daily total of 1400 calories. Initially there were 46 women in each group. By the end of the study (12 weeks), the BF group had 38 participants, while the D group had 36.

After 12 weeks on their respective diets, both groups lost weight, but the BF group had lost significantly more weight than the D group. Importantly, the metabolic profiles, which also were improved in both groups, improved more in the BF group. These parameters included blood glucose and insulin responses to a glucose challenge, as well as blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

In addition, the participants in the BF group reported feeling more satiated and less hungry than those in the D group.

ACSH’s Dr. Ruth Kava was impressed by the study. While small, the study was well-designed; it raises some interesting questions about the importance of meal timing as a mechanism for affecting health. It’s important to note that these women were already abnormal in terms of their metabolism and body weight, so this might be more a means of treatment rather than prevention.