Researchers doubt breakfast’s value for weight loss

By ACSH Staff — September 13, 2013

You can hear or read it everywhere breakfast is the most important meal of the day; can’t lose weight or maintain weight loss if you skip breakfast it’s in media reports, government websites, even those of the Mayo Clinic and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. But a recent review, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, of relevant data and reports finds that the research supporting such statements just isn’t there.

Dr. Andrew W. Brown and colleagues from the University of Alabama, Birmingham, examined the research that is widely cited as evidence for the oft-repeated statements about the importance of breakfast. In a meta-analysis they reviewed studies purporting to show that breakfast had a positive effect on weight loss and/or weight loss maintenance.

They found that the recently-published scientific studies supposedly showing the proposed effect of breakfast on obesity are only presumed to be true, and that this presumption underlies the widespread belief of the value of breakfast. Most of the studies were observational in nature and thus could not establish causality even though the investigators often spoke about their results as being causal. That is, the authors stated or implied that breakfast consumption caused weight loss when it was only associated with weight loss or weight loss maintenance.

Further, they found that much of the research in this area lacked probative value, that is, it did not provide real evidence for a causal relationship. Finally, these investigators found widespread evidence of biased research reporting, expressed as: 1) biased interpretation of an author’s own results; 2) improper use of causal language in describing one’s own results; 3) misleadingly citing others results; and 4) improper use of causal language.

In their conclusions, the authors of the review stated Although we hope that the results presented in the current article will help individuals identify biased reporting in their own work (ourselves included), it is the peer review process that may be best improved by raising awareness of bias.
ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava notes I find it disturbing that these investigators found so much misinterpretation and mis-citing of the research data related to breakfast consumption. This type of pseudo-scientific sleight-of-hand certainly does not help consumers understand what behaviors can assist them with weight loss issues, and undermines their confidence in mainstream science.

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