

The breakfast club

Eating breakfast can bring about noticeable improvements in health, according to a new campaign launched earlier this month. **Matt Williams** reports

The advice to eat breakfast every day was the focus of a new breakfast campaign launched this month, 'Breakfast is Best' (www.breakfastisbest.eu), to raise awareness of the importance of eating a good breakfast regularly in order to maintain a healthy weight and improve overall concentration levels. With recent statistics showing that 61 per cent of people in Europe miss breakfast in the morning, the campaign aims to use evidence from nutritional reports and other scientific studies to underline the health benefits of a regular breakfast.

Vincenzo Costigliola, president of the European medical association, speaking at the launch of the campaign, said that missing out on food at the start of the day is one of the causes of Europe's current problems with people who are overweight and eating unhealthily. "Right now we are confronted with real problems of obesity and malnutrition. It's more and more important therefore to have equitable meals," he said.

As to why people choose to miss out on breakfast in the morning, not enough time and a desire to lose weight were highlighted as two key reasons. A study carried out in 2006 showed that as many as 20 per cent of EU citizens have been on diets in the last 12 months. Not eating in the morning, however, can actually worsen efforts to lose weight, says Karin Hädell, honorary president of the European federation of the association of dieticians. She says that there is evidence that people who eat breakfast not only lose weight but also experience less hunger and fewer cravings for food. But, she adds, there is a lack of awareness among the general population about how missing a meal in the morning can lead to a tendency to snack on unhealthy products and contribute to the problem of obesity. "We want to include the importance of breakfast in public health campaigns and nutritional advice," she says.

Similarly, in children, a regular breakfast can lead to what Jean-Claude Gonon,

secretary general of the European association of teachers, describes as a "noticeable difference" in terms of an improvement in school results and a sharper ability to concentrate. "More and more children come to school having not eaten," he says, "It's clear that the ability to concentrate is a lot weaker without breakfast. It's important that we work with parents to develop the habit of providing a regular breakfast for their children."

While those behind the campaign said that they "don't expect the European parliament, commission or council to make breakfast mandatory", they emphasised the important role that the institutions can play to raise awareness in the member states and encourage more people to enjoy breakfast as part of a healthy diet. "Breakfast is one instrument in the complex orchestra that is the health of the population," says Costigliola. "We need to change our habits and to create a new relationship with food." ★

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