



To Eat or Not to Eat Before My Morning Workout

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Common sense? Lost in fitness publications

"Common sense is not so common," according to 18th century French philosopher Voltaire. But maybe he didn't have it quite right; we all possess common sense or our species would have died out centuries ago.

As we've evolved intellectually, however, we've begun micro-analyzing everything. This results in more thought-provoking questions about a particular subject, but sometimes our attempts to answer these questions with scientific rhetoric distract us from a common sense answer or worse—we arrive at no answer at all. In other words, we either lose our common sense in all the rhetoric because we read and process too much, or we ignore (or can't access) the answer we would intuitively come to. And here we are, completely lost!

Will I burn more fat if I don't eat before exercising (especially first thing in the morning)?

I make the above "common sense" comments to make the point that we all have the ability to reason out the answers to most fitness questions. And although the *true* answer to the question of eating and early morning exercising has been documented, scientific validation of a topic like this is probably a waste of time. I say this because the clinical text published in studies related to this topic often allows non-scientists and marketing experts to misinterpret or draw erroneous conclusions. These conclusions are based on lack of knowledge regarding the big picture and, as a result, marketing teams and the media put a "spin" on the information for the purpose of selling something. In other words, they choose one piece of a complex puzzle and take it out of context to build a case for something controversial, entertaining, and inaccurate for personal gain.

Consider the following examples:

- **Insulin is bad and stores fat.** Okay, do you think you may just be eating too much if you're getting fatter? Or is it the insulin, which, by the way, is necessary to keep us alive?
- **Low intensity exercise uses more fat than high intensity exercise.** So, does walking lead to more fat loss than running stairs for the same allotted time? Or do you think the harder the bout of exercise the more fat you will lose daily? Have you ever seen a fat sprinter?
- **Eating food before you go to bed will end up as fat on your body.** If that were the case, then if you ate nothing all day and ate one piece of bread before you went to sleep, it would turn to fat. Or do you think the bread turning to fat would depend on how much you consumed during the day? The position of the sun in the sky really has nothing to do with it.

See, I bet by using common sense you got the right answers. Now, to the topic that brought us here: **Should I work out on an empty stomach to burn more fat?** Our response to this also speaks to the preposterous notion of doing cardio in a fasting state to increase fat loss. Notice I phrased the statement correctly—to increase fat loss—*not* to increase the use of fat for fuel during exercise. This is the only thing someone could have read in a related study and taken out of context. Then, whether accidentally or not, they arrived at a wrong conclusion and published it, which encouraged people to ignore their own common sense.

In reality, you will burn *fewer* calories if you do not eat before a workout. Why do you think all performance athletes eat their biggest meal before training *and* consume a pre-workout snack? So they have a better workout, which will eventually use *more* calories overall and help improve performance. This, in turn, will burn more calories, and so on . . .

Okay, now repeat after me: working out harder because you feel better obviously burns more calories. This is common sense. We know, from research, that the higher the intensity of exercise, the greater the fat usage post-exercise—and I mean two or three times more. You could never match this higher intensity in a fasting state because you'd have had no food for the last 6-12 hours, leaving energy stores significantly depleted. I guess someone missed that part. In other words, who cares where your calories come from during exercise as long as you don't replace them all throughout the remainder of the day?

Your daily caloric deficit determines your weight/fat loss

Keep in mind that exercise itself does not burn a significant amount of fat. It is the contribution of exercise to a person's total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), including the intensity, that affects fat loss. In other words, exercise simply adds to your daily calorie needs, and as long as you do not eat more to compensate (thereby keeping your intake below your needs) your body will lose fat. But to our point, if you break the fast before you go to the gym, you will perform better, enhance recovery and potentially burn more calories. The higher the intensity of your workout (which you can now perform thanks to having filled your energy stores with a pre-workout snack), the more calories from fat will be used throughout the day in order to fill your energy deficit. The energy or calorie deficit, not the workout or when you eat, is what determines how much weight/fat you lose.

Don't add calories – time them

Don't forget, I did not say anything about *adding* food calories to your daily intake. All I'm suggesting you change is the way to distribute your food calories throughout the day. Meal spacing has added benefits such as using more calories to digest each meal (the more times you turn the digestive process on and off, the more calories you will

burn), and gives your body a steady stream of nutrition (enhancing recovery and energy). Your first meal of the day breaks the fast and "fires up" the metabolism, so the sooner you do this, the better. That's why you are generally hungry sooner when you do eat a "good breakfast" than when you skip it—the body is revved up and ready to go.

As mentioned, managing *total* daily energy intake (TDEI) makes the greatest contribution to reducing fat stores – so work out with more intensity (because you can) and don't eat *more* calories; simply place them properly.

All that said, when TDEI is the same, consuming an appropriate meal before any workout probably has little effect on *fat loss* alone in the average weight loss program. So, should you work out on an empty stomach to burn more fat? Your common sense-based conclusion to this question (which you arrived at before you ever read anything) was the right one. Do what comes naturally and makes you feel good.

Getting the biggest overall "bang for the buck"

On the other hand, eating before you work out is mandatory for performance athletes in order to enhance each training bout, recovery and the final outcome. Therefore, for everyone, it seems obvious that ingesting part of your daily energy requirements before you train is only logical - and in doing so you will

- Fill energy stores before a work out (not by adding daily calories, but by redistributing them)
- Break the fast to boost metabolism and continue a constant flow of nutrients
- Increase workout performance, which will use more calories and allow for a higher intensity workout that burns two to three times more fat throughout the day following exercise
- Enhance recovery to improve maintenance or growth of muscle which also adds to the metabolic rate
- Increase spontaneous physical activity (SPA) by never staying in a fasting state beyond rising in the morning – i.e. your body naturally wants to move more.

So, if you have any doubts, eat before you train. Innate common sense should tell you to eat if you have not eaten for the last 8-12 hours and you are about to perform an activity that requires more energy than anything else you do all day. It takes calories to burn *more* calories, but don't add calories – simply take the total daily calories you are allowed, based on your goal, and distribute them properly throughout the day based on your activities.

Early morning training

In light of all the recent research regarding the benefits of ingesting a pre- & post-training snack containing protein, carbohydrate and low fat in a quick digesting form (e.g. an Apex bar, shake, cookie, etc.), it's hard to imagine anyone choosing not to eat before training. It is now VERY clear that immediate pre- & post- nutrition intake dramatically improves exercise-induced results when compared to skipping these feedings--even when all else is equal (total daily diet, training and supplements – see [March 07 Newsletter](#)).

When training first thing in the morning, like I do, nothing changes as it relates to your pre/post training nutrition.

Simply ingest an Apex snack or shake 10-40 minutes before you train and repeat the snack immediately post training. Although liquid delivery allows the most rapid absorption (e.g. Apex shakes/mixes), all Apex foods meet the quick digesting criteria for hitting the pre/post "metabolic windows" where nutrient sensitivity is highest, thus maximizing recovery including muscle protein synthesis. And remember, you are not adding calories, you are re-appropriating them.

Another question you might hear regularly could be something like, "What time of day is best to train?" Now, think. What's your first reaction?

Voltaire also said, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." When deciding what's right for you, don't listen to marketing or fitness "experts" who literally bank on controversy and misinformation. Whether in the gym or in life, often we must let common sense prevail--especially since you have Apex as your "common sense support resource."

--Neal