

Study: Skipping breakfast not a healthy idea

By Mary MacVean, Los Angeles Times

Even Elmo knows that breakfast is the most important meal of the day in his world, but there hasn't been enough scientific evidence for the federal government to recommend it for grownups.

Still, it sounds like it might be a wise move to stock up on oatmeal and the like. In an article released Monday in the journal *Circulation*, researchers found that men who skipped breakfast had a 27 percent higher risk of coronary heart disease than men who ate their morning meal – though we imagine that big daily plates of bacon and pancakes with syrup are not the ideal.

The researchers also found, using a large ongoing study of mostly white men, that those who ate late at night had a 55 percent higher risk of coronary heart disease. They didn't find an association with the number of times a day a person ate.

Those associations were true – if somewhat less so – when other habits and conditions that would cause coronary heart disease were factored in, said the researchers, from Harvard University and Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Snacking and skipping breakfast are common among Americans, the researchers noted. And such habits have been associated with weight gain, high blood pressure and diabetes, they wrote.

So they looked at the Health Professionals Follow-up Study, an ongoing look at 51,529 men who are questioned every two years about their health and habits.

The men who did not eat breakfast were younger, more often single and more likely to smoke and less active than the other men. The late-night snackers were also more likely to smoke and to have hypertension and sleep less than seven hours a night, the researchers wrote.

But the quality of the men's diets was on average very high.

"The timing of the meal may be directly responsible for the metabolic effects that may lead to CHD, or alternatively, eating habits may be a proxy for specific foods more likely to be consumed at breakfast or late at night such as breakfast cereals high in dietary fiber and fortified micronutrients like folate or late-night snack foods high in calories," the researchers wrote.

They said they would like to see additional studies looking at women and ethnic groups.