Adolescents who skip breakfast or opt for something sugary in the morning are raising their risks of health problems as adults.

A new study by researchers at Sweden’s Umeå University reveals a link consolidating the arguments for eating a wholesome breakfast: Adolescents who eat well in the morning appear to benefit from better health later in life.

Other studies have also shown that dropping breakfast in your younger years can have an effect on your health as the decades roll by, say the researchers.

“Young people who eat breakfast are most likely to continue doing so as adults,” says Umeå reseacher Maria Wennberg.

“Eating breakfast can make it easier to maintain good food habits the rest of the day, because your blood sugar balance is better,” says Wennberg.

Not everyone agrees that a morning meal is necessary for good health, especially if you are a healthy adult.

For some time, scientists and nutritionists have been going at each other with verbal knives and forks about the importance of breakfast.

But they generally agree that breakfast is important for children and teens, especially with regard to maintaining their powers of concentration, disposition and energy levels throughout the day.

Nearly 70 percent higher

The study involved a total of 889 people. The test subjects were 16 years old in 1981 when they answered questions about what they ate for breakfast. Researchers have summoned them for periodic health check-ups, the last of which was in 2008.

Umeå researcher Wennberg has found that the prevalence of metabolic syndrome in adulthood (43 years) was nearly 70 percent higher among those who had been lax as teenagers with regard to nutritional breakfasts.

Metabolic syndrome is a group of risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

They are abdominal obesity, low high-density cholesterol levels, high blood levels of fats (triglycerides), elevated blood pressure and high fasting blood sugar (insulin resistance). A person with at least three of these factors is considered to have the syndrome.

The study defined poor breakfast habits as skipping breakfast or only eating or drinking something sweet.
Causes are cloudy

The links that Wennberg and her colleagues have shown about poor breakfast habits are seen even after they have accounted for lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, physical activity and socio-economic status.

Nevertheless, the long-term Swedish study is observational, which means it cannot pin down the direct causes with certainty.

In other words, hidden factors may have contributed to the development of metabolic syndrome later in life in teenagers who had poor breakfast habits.

“We haven’t investigated their breakfast habits as adults, so we can’t be fully sure, but other studies have indicated that these kinds of eating habits are formed at quite an early age,” says Wennberg.

She adds that more research will be required to uncover the mechanism triggering the link between poor breakfast routines and subsequent development of metabolic syndrome.

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