

# A short history of Breakfast

## Introduction questions

- 🔊 What did you eat for breakfast this morning?
- 🔊 What might you get in a "Full English Breakfast"? Have you ever tried it?
- 🔊 What is a traditional breakfast where you live?

## Breakfast

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Breakfast as we know it didn't exist for large parts of history. The Romans didn't really eat it, usually consuming only one meal a day around noon, says food historian Caroline Yeldham. In fact, *breakfast was actively frowned upon*.

"The Romans believed it was healthier to eat only one meal a day," she says. "They were obsessed with digestion and eating more than one meal was considered a form of *gluttony*. This thinking *impacted on* the way people ate for a very long time."

In the Middle Ages monastic life largely shaped when people ate, says food historian Ivan Day. Nothing could be eaten before morning Mass and meat could only be eaten for half the days of the year. It's thought the word breakfast entered the English language during this time and literally meant "break the night's *fast*".

Religious ritual also gave us the full English breakfast. On Collop Monday, the day before Shrove Tuesday, people had to use up meat before the start of Lent. Much of that meat was pork and bacon as pigs were kept by many people. The meat was often eaten with eggs, which also had to be used up, and the *precursor* of the full English breakfast was born.

But at the time it probably wasn't eaten in the morning.

In about the 17th Century it is believed that all social classes started eating breakfast, according to chef Clarissa Dickson Wright. After the restoration of Charles II, coffee, tea and dishes like *scrambled* eggs started to appear on the tables of the wealthy. By the late 1740s, breakfast rooms also started appearing in the homes of the rich.

This morning meal reached new levels of decadence in aristocratic circles in the 19th Century, with the fashion for hunting parties that lasted days, even weeks. Up to 24 dishes would be served for breakfast.

The Industrial Revolution in the mid-19th Century regularised working hours, with labourers needing an early meal *to sustain* them at work. All classes started to eat a meal before going to work, even the bosses.

At the turn of the 20th Century, breakfast was revolutionised once again by American John Harvey Kellogg. He accidentally left some boiled maize out and it went stale. He passed it through some rollers and baked it, creating the world's first cornflake. He *sparked* a multi-billion pound industry. By the 1920s and 1930s the government was promoting breakfast as the most important meal of the day, but then World War II made *the usual breakfast fare* hard to get. But as Britain emerged from the post-war years into the economically liberated 1950s, things like American toasters, sliced bread, instant coffee and pre-sugared cereals invaded the home. Breakfast as we now know it.

Taken from "Breakfast, lunch and dinner: Have we always eaten them?"

By Denise Winterman, BBC News Magazine, 15 November 2012

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20243692>



## Vocabulary

Look at the words and phrases *in bold* in the text. Can you work out what they mean? Write them next to the appropriate each description/synonym:

_____	to eat nothing, or much less than you usually eat for a period of time
_____	to start or create something new
_____	greed
_____	mixed up when cooked
_____	to think that something is wrong and that you should not do it
_____	a person or thing that comes before another of the same kind; a forerunner
_____	to support someone or something so that they can live or exist
_____	to affect something or someone

## Comprehension questions

1. Why didn't people have breakfast in Roman times or in the Middle Ages according to the text?
2. How did religion play a part in the creation of the "Full English Breakfast"?
3. Which historical movement changed breakfast from a decadence for wealthy aristocrats to an essential meal for the working classes ?

## Follow up discussion

- 🗣️ Do you think breakfast is the most important meal of the day? Why/Why not?
- 🗣️ Why do you think things like cereal and toast are popular for breakfast?
- 🗣️ How many different ways do you know to cook an egg?