

In A Bite with Charlotte Mei

Tidbits - Why you should pay attention to the first bite of your meal
Full Transcript

Charlotte 00:04

Hey, you're listening to another Tidbits episode and in fact, the last one for this season before I go off on a break and come back with more and great stuff for you. So, thank you for listening to this entire season, and I hope you've enjoyed it... You've learned something new, something interesting... You can let go of certain myths that have been haunting you over the past couple of years and that you're building a healthier and easier relationship with food!

While we're on the break, the newsletter will still be running, so if you haven't yet subscribed to it, head over to my website, thecharlottemei.com to do so.

I'm currently travelling in Spain at the moment. And gosh, I got to say, it's so good being back in Barcelona. This is my second time and I'll soon be heading to Seville, which is completely new to me so I'm really looking forward to that! Now, it's no surprise, but I travel through my stomach, right? The food here has been nothing short of incredible. Everything is bursting with flavour and freshness.

And if you're into the bar scene, gosh, it's really exciting here! I've been to about four different bars now, I think over the past two nights, and I've really enjoyed it! I would say I had hands-down the best cocktail I've ever had in a very, very long time just on my first night, actually. I had a gin that was infused with Roquefort blue cheese. I mean, who would have thought of that?! And it was mixed with orange marmalade, a few other citrus juices, and it was just so, so good!

I've got to admit, though, the only thing I'm missing here is vegetables. It's my absolute mission to look for more of it because it's been three days, and, um... yeah, I'm in need of it basically, my body craves it. I need some fibre. This also gave me an idea to look into what nutrition looks like in different countries. I think that would be super cool. So that's an idea to explore.

For now, let's get onto our agenda for tidbits.

Remember how one of the myths that came up last week was that eating fruits before a meal was supposedly not good for digestion. Now that we've established that it's okay to eat fruits before or after a meal because digestion happens no matter what order you've eaten your food, I want to talk about something different. It's related to it and it's worth paying attention to. And that is the sequence of your food intake within a meal. This can influence postprandial blood glucose levels, which means to say how your blood sugar levels react after you have a meal.

So let's talk about glucose levels first and what happens after we consume food.

Now, during digestion, the starches and sugars in our food are broken down into smaller units like glucose which then get absorbed into our bloodstream and transported all over our body for use as energy. And what doesn't get used up gets stored in our liver and muscles as glycogen. So when we consume a meal that is high in carbohydrates, a large amount of glucose enters the bloodstream and we see a spike in our glucose levels. This effect that food has on blood glucose levels after food is called the glycemic response, and it's totally normal for our glucose levels to rise after a meal.

But what I would like to do here is to minimise the glucose spikes and keep our blood glucose levels steady so we don't experience energy slumps after our meals and this is particularly important for diabetics. So an example of this energy slump, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about after having a large plate of, say, noodles or pasta or fried rice, you feel... you feel alright 5 to 10 minutes after your meal, but soon after that you feel sleepy, you can't go back to work... And some people say I'm in a food coma, right? So that's exactly what we want to avoid. And it's not just because you've eaten carbohydrates. There are a lot of variables here. So this thing I'm about to share with you hopefully will help you in future.

So if you want to talk about slowing down the release of glucose into our bloodstream, consuming carbohydrates that are high in fibre is one of the ways to do so. And this is why wholegrain carbohydrates are so highly emphasised.

So that's one way to do it, right? However, I want to share something that's super easy for you to do that can also help to reduce this glycemic response or to reduce the blood glucose spikes after a meal. And listen up. All this requires you to do is to make sure that you consume vegetables in the first bites of your meal.

Scientific studies have found that starting one's meal with food that is high in fibre or water such as vegetables, lead to a reduced glycemic response as opposed to eating carbohydrates first. What happens is that the fibre in the vegetables coat the walls of the intestines with a viscous mesh. It's like a thick, wet net. And so because of this, the sugars get absorbed into the bloodstream much slower. And this is what we want. There's more of a steady release of sugars into our bloodstream.

So putting this into practice, if you're at a restaurant, remember to order a vegetable dish and have that as the starter to your meal. If you've ordered a burger, get a side salad and dig into that before the burger. If you're eating a rice or noodle dish, have the vegetables first. It's as simple as that.

So say you're at a buffet, make your first round... *because we know we have several rounds of food...* So make your first round of food, vegetables. And this can be any sort. Roasted

vegetables, a raw, leafy salad, a veggie stew, stir fry, whatever you fancy. It's a buffet after all so I hope you find something that you like. Then, follow that round with high protein foods like seafood, meat and legumes and then your carbohydrates. This is not to say that you must eat all your vegetables at the beginning of the meal. That would be ideal for many reasons, but simply having vegetables in your first couple of bites would be helpful to manage your glycemic response.

And remember this even for your first meal of the day. If you're someone that normally has breakfast, make sure that you have some fibre and protein to start your day.

Carbohydrates are important, too, but I'm not highlighting it because more often than not, this is what people very naturally reach out to, and that's completely fine. And we do need the energy and nutrients from carbohydrates, especially after an overnight fast. But what I'm trying to say is try not to reach out for something sweet or that's carbohydrate only for your first meal.

So, for example, say you're a cereal person. Try to get one that contains a high fibre grain like oats, and then throw in some nuts or seeds for extra protein. Or if you want to have a slice of bread. First, grab wholemeal bread for the fibre. And secondly, pair that with something that contains protein. So say eggs, cheese or unsweetened peanut butter or hey, I'm going to put in a shameless plug here for my all time favourite toast recipe for the year. Make a kimchi cream cheese toast. This recipe is on my TikTok and my Instagram, and it's super simple. All you gotta do is spread some cream cheese and a slice of toast... that will give you protein and then top that with kimchi, which contains fibre and a ton of flavour. Oh, it is just so good.

So this is the ideal order. Vegetables first then protein and fat, then carbohydrates. But of course, do this only when it's easy. I don't want you segmenting your macronutrients at the dining table, so don't stress if everything is mixed together because that's normal, too. So I would say to prioritise getting vegetables into your meal as a starting point. And then, if possible, make that your first couple of bites. And if you find yourself having carbohydrates alone, remember that carbohydrates like to be in a relationship with something. So protein, fat or something with fibre.

So a few examples are, you know, if you're having ice cream, crush some almonds or hazelnuts over it and add some fruit like blueberries. If you want to have some granola, have it with some yoghurt and throw in some almonds. Or if you're having some crackers, dip it into some hummus or guacamole or top it with some tuna mayo. And if it's kaya toast that you want, this may be new to some of you, but request for some peanut butter to be added into it. It's actually really yummy. And the protein from the peanut butter will help prevent a high glucose spike.

So there you go. Just a few ideas for you. And if you listen to episode 3 on Hawker Food, there is a similar theme here. And that is: think about what you can add to the food that you're having to make it more nutritious. So it's not about saying what you can't have is

going for what you want at a good amount, eating in moderation and then adding extra things to it... extra protein, extra fibre to keep you full for a longer to give you more nutrients and like we're speaking about here to lower those glucose spikes

Now, one very important takeaway here is that all macronutrients, so carbohydrates, protein, fat are essential parts of our diet and we should not be demonising or cutting any of it from our diet.

What we're encouraging here is to make the first few bites of each meal something that contains fibre and to ensure that we're consuming protein in each meal too. So if you know someone who has diabetes, share this with them. Or if you're a diabetic yourself, practising this can be really useful.

So wrapping all of this up, you can eat the same foods, but just the simple action of changing the order in which you eat the components can influence how your sugars are absorbed into your bloodstream. Have a go at this and let me know what you think.

Every week I put together a newsletter that I think you'll enjoy. Like this podcast, it has nuggets of information on nutrition. And it also shares a little more into my daily life. From a behind the scenes look into the projects I'm involved in, to the stuff I consume. Just three things from my week that I want to share with you. To subscribe, all you have to do is head over to my website, thecharlottemei.com, or click the link on the show notes.

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