

POPULAR WEIGHT LOSS DIETS

Low carbohydrate diets have become very popular. In fact, three of the best selling books in 1998 were various types of low carbohydrate diets. Although these books are generally considered "non-fiction," many nutrition experts have serious concerns about these and other "fad diets."

Why Are These Diets Popular?

- Marketing and word of mouth - Many dieters have become bored and disillusioned with low fat diets. Diets that claim to have a new angle on weight loss have a marketing advantage. In addition, people who start one of these diets and experience some quick weight loss are likely to announce their results to their friends.
- It "works" - When most people "go on a diet," they pay more attention to what they eat and drink and they may be more motivated to increase their exercise. Furthermore, diets that let you eat "all you want" of certain foods like ice cream while you avoid common foods like bread or potatoes often result in an overall calorie reduction. Cutting back 500 calories each day will usually lead to a loss of about 1 pound of body weight per week, even if the dieter doesn't make any other changes like getting more exercise. In addition, very low carbohydrate diets cause a temporary loss of additional weight as the body loses water and even some protein/muscle in addition to fat.

If It Works, Why Shouldn't I Follow One of These Diets?

- It doesn't last - For many people the results of these diets are temporary. When you return to more normal eating, the weight comes back.
- Health concerns - These diet plans are not considered health promoting for the long run. They tend to be low in dietary fiber, phytochemicals (beneficial components of plant foods), vitamins and minerals. In addition, these diets can be high in fat and saturated fats, which can increase your risk of heart disease over time.

How Do These Diets Work?

In the first few days of a very low carbohydrate diet, water is released from the tissues. The body uses the little bit of carbohydrate it has stored as glycogen. Glycogen is stored bound to water in the body, so water is excreted as the glycogen stores are reduced and people can lose 2-4 pounds or more of body water in just a few days. Unfortunately, a body deprived of carbohydrate may respond in ways that are not desirable. Excessive water loss can lead to dehydration and some lean body tissue (muscle and organ tissue) may be sacrificed as protein is used for energy.

Carbohydrate is the preferred fuel for the brain and it supplies much of the energy used by the muscles. If your body doesn't have a readily available source of carbohydrate, it will turn to stored fat and protein for energy. When stored fat is broken down rapidly, a condition called ketosis occurs. This suppresses hunger and reduces calorie intake, but it can also cause nausea, weakness, dehydration, and fatigue. It also alters the balance of hormones such as insulin and glucagons, which may affect sodium and water excretion.

Who Should Not Follow These Diets?

- People with diseases like diabetes and kidney disease can experience negative effects when their intakes of carbohydrates, protein and fat are drastically changed. They should not change

their diet prescription without approval from their physician and/or dietician.

- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding generally should not be on any type of weight loss diet.
- Children, even overweight children, should not be on "diets." Encourage children to be physically active and eat healthfully as described by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.
- People with a history of gout might have a painful attack.
- People with a risk of osteoporosis should make sure they maintain adequate intakes of calcium and Vitamin D.

Specific Concerns

The advice in *Dr. Atkins Diet Revolution* has not been proven in careful scientific studies. It is high in protein, low in carbohydrates, and high in fat. In fact, about 60% of calories can come from fat when you follow this diet plan. If you choose to follow this diet, do not follow the induction diet for more than 14 days. Drinking plenty of water may reduce your risk of dehydration. Consider using a multivitamin/mineral supplement with calcium.

The *Zone Diet* has been developed and tested mainly in athletes. It is high in protein and low in carbohydrates. The food combinations recommended in this book are unnecessary restrictive for most people. The diet attempts to regulate hormones and body chemicals such as; insulin, glucagons and eicosanoids, but the long-term success of this approach is not proven.

The *Sugar Busters* diet is based on a questionable interpretation of physiological principles. It tends to be high in protein and low in carbohydrates. It also promotes an eating pattern that can be very high in fat. Like the Zone Diet, the Sugar Busters diet attempts to control insulin release and claims that obesity is related to a condition called insulin resistance. Insulin resistance may be a real concern for some people, but there is little if any proof that following this type of diet plan is the best treatment.

What Really Works?

People are most likely to lose weight and keep it off over time if they establish a pattern of healthful eating and physical activity that can be sustained for many years. For most people, this is best achieved by eating a variety of foods that are lower in calories and fat and by eating smaller portions of foods high in fat and calories. If you are not physically active, spend less time in sedentary activities such as watching television and computer surfing, and be more active throughout the day. Rather than follow fad diets, check with your doctor and/or dietitian and make a long-term plan that you can live with. This is especially important if you are severely overweight, have excess abdominal fat, or if you have a weight-related medical problem such as diabetes.

This fact sheet has been prepared by: Susan Nitzke, Ph.D., R.D., Associate Professor of Nutritional Sciences, UW-Madison Extension, and Katherine Dupree, Rock County Wisconsin Extension Nutrition Education Program Coordinator. It was reviewed by Dr. Richard Atkinson, W.O. Beers-Murphy Clinical Nutrition Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is based on a summary prepared by Kathryn Kolasa, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.N., Department of Family Medicine, East Carolina University.