

Low Carb (Protein-Centered) Diet

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A Low-Carb Diet (often called The Atkins' Diet or a high protein diet) is simply a diet in which meat or another protein is the center of each meal. Fat is reduced but not eliminated; sugar and starch are minimized. Many studies have shown that this diet is the best choice for most people. Long term, it is very healthy, excellent for controlling diabetes and heart disease, and most important, you won't feel hungry all the time. However, it can become boring if you reduce carbs too strictly

Low Carb diets were controversial for decades and Dr. Robert Atkins was publically mocked. The medical establishment worried that if people ate too much saturated fat, it could lead to heart disease, stroke, cancer, and worst of all, recognition of the nutritional incompetence of the medical establishment. Boy, they were wrong.

For at least ten years the news about protein-centered diets has been consistently good. Study after study has shown that a protein-centered, low-carb diet can improve cholesterol levels and other markers for cardiac events regardless of the saturated fat eaten. In addition, protein-centered meals are clearly superior to carbohydrate-centered meals for most diabetics. Other studies have shown that people on protein-centered diets have higher success rates than people who reduce fat or calories (links below.)

In a perfect world, people following a low-carb diet live on meat, dairy, vegetables – and nothing else. However, in the real world, few people can last more than a week without eating a little bread, potatoes, and fruit. The rule is: have small portions of carbs infrequently. Have one slice of whole wheat bread, not two. Have half an apple now and the other half after dinner. It will make a great 50-calorie dessert.

Here are a few simple rules for a protein-centered eating program:

1. Eliminate almost all of the carbohydrates from your diet for 1 – 3 weeks. No longer - you might snap! Depending on your size and on how much you eat, you'll lose 5 - 15 pounds.
2. Slowly work in a few healthy carbs. Beans, lentils, whole grain bread, brown rice, potatoes and yams, fruit, but not too much on any day. A maximum of one portion per meal. Find the minimal level of carbs you are comfortable with and stay there. Note that these are all healthy 'complex carbs' (<http://lowcarbdiets.about.com/od/nutrition/a/starch.htm>) Sugars are off limits.
3. Have protein as the center of every meal, including breakfast. For how long? For the rest of your life. Meat, fish, eggs, cottage cheese, and tofu are all excellent sources of protein. Beans, legumes, and grains are not. Treat them as side dishes to eat in moderation.

4. How much protein should you eat? In The Zone Diet (http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=the+zone+diet), Dr. Barry Sears has a great approach: select a portion of meat that is about the size of your palm. Fish tends to have fewer calories than beef so you can have a slightly larger portion.
5. Enjoy modest amounts of fats. Don't eat unnecessary calories like fried foods, but don't worry about a little cooking oil. A small portion of cheese is fine, but avoid low-fat foods and dressings. Pure sugar.
6. Save desserts for special occasions – and if you have more than one or two special occasions a month, please write and tell me how you do it!
7. Avoid sugar, honey, maple syrup, fruit juice, white flour, white rice, and similar unhealthy carbs. They will raise your blood sugar and make you feel hungry, even if your belly is full.

For how long should you live this way? Forever. It isn't perfect but it beats every alternative.

The following books will give you excellent guides to a low-carb diet you can live with. Just remember not to stay on an ultra-low carb diet for too long – that technique has a 100% failure rate.

The Paleo Diet: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=paleo+diet#/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=The+paleo+diet&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3AThe+paleo+diet

The South Beach Diet: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=paleo+diet#/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=The+South+Beach+Diet&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3AThe+South+Beach+Diet

Dr. Atkins New Diet Revolution: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=paleo+diet#/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=Dr.+Atkins+New+Diet+Revolution%09&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3ADr.+Atkins+New+Diet+Revolution%09

Here are links to studies about the effectiveness and safety of low-carb, protein-centered diets:

Best Foods for Long Term Weight Maintenance: <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/24/health/la-he-weight-loss-diet-20101124>

New England Journal of Medicine: <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1007137>

Low Carb Diets Better for Controlling Blood Pressure: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8478629.stm>

Here are links to information about the Glycemic Index and its neglected smarter cousin, the Glycemic Load.

Wikipedia Entry on Glycemic Load: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glycemic_load

Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load for 100+ foods:

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsweek/Glycemic_index_and_glycemic_load_for_100_foods.htm

Remember, Low Carb diets have the best record of success but they might not be for you. If you aren't sure, take a test drive. Try the Low-Carb lifestyle for a few weeks, then try the Low-Fat lifestyle. (Don't try to combine them; this will not work.) Pick your favorite way to live and stick with it. For life.

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