



## **QuickBites Tip**

### **Good Carbs, Bad Carbs, Low Carbs, No Carbs**

#### **Do low carbohydrate diets work for weight management?**

There is much disagreement, even among the experts, as to the effectiveness of low carbohydrate diets on weight management. Low carb diets, depending on the level of restriction, can bring about significant weight loss, especially in the early days and weeks of dieting. But, many question their effectiveness in promoting long term weight maintenance after these initial losses.

***Long-term weight loss maintenance is the goal and the true indicator of success.***

Carbohydrates hold onto water in the body, therefore, when they are restricted from the diet, and the storage form of carbohydrates (glycogen) in the liver and muscles are depleted, the attached water is excreted. This accounts for most of the initial weight loss. This also explains why some low carb dieters experience alarming weight gains a day or two after adding carbs back into their diets.

When a dieter stays on a low carb diet more than a few days, the body adjusts its energy metabolism method and begins to burn mostly fats from fat stores, and proteins either from the diet or from muscles. (When a person eats a diet balanced with carbohydrates, proteins and fats, the body will burn a mixture of all three for fuel throughout any given day.) If the carb restriction is strict enough, the dieter will enter ketosis, which means the body is breaking down fat and the ketones, which are the acidic by-products of fat breakdown, enter the blood stream for fuel. Ketosis will usually kick in about 3 days after beginning a diet of less than 50 grams of carbohydrates per day. Generally, the first few days of a strict carbohydrate-restricted diet will be the most difficult, because the dieter will feel sick with flu-like symptoms until the body makes the energy metabolism adjustment from burning carbohydrates to burning fats and proteins.

Those who preach caution with low carbohydrate diets do so with good reason. When carbs are restricted from the diet, calories will then be provided in the diet primarily from proteins and fats.

***Therefore, a low carb diet is essentially a high protein, high fat diet.***

Carbohydrates are considered to be our primary fuel source and provide our bodies and brains with energy. Therefore, low carb diets can lead to fatigue, which can lower the intensity of workouts and affect mood and concentration levels. The fluid losses associated with low carb diets are also a concern and can contribute to dehydration and constipation. In addition, the high protein levels can overwork the kidneys and cause calcium losses, which can contribute to osteoporosis and kidney stones. Low carb diets often contain large portions of meat which can raise the amount of saturated fat in the diet and contribute to cardiovascular disease risk. And, even though the low carb diets include vegetables, they are often low in fiber because much of the fiber content of our diet comes from whole grain sources. This can further contribute to constipation problems. Also, by restricting grains, fruits, starchy vegetables, legumes and dairy products, the dieter is limiting vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals which are important for good health and protect us from diseases. Low carb diets are also difficult to maintain for long periods of time and many people miss the foods that they love, making it a "diet" and not a long term, positive lifestyle change.

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There are those who believe that low carb diets can be beneficial and believe they have a place in dietary treatment plans. Proponents claim that a low carb plan can help with the control of blood glucose and triglyceride levels in people with diabetes. In addition, the high protein and fat content of the diet helps provide satiety, therefore, low carb dieters often feel less hungry. Ketogenic diets are sometimes used to control seizures in severe epileptics. Proponents of low-carb diets believe that ketosis is the best way to lose fat because the body is actually in a true fat burning mode.

What can we conclude from this information?

***In general, severely restricted carbohydrate diets are not recommended for long term use because, at this point, we are unsure how detrimental they can be to overall health.*** Long term compliance is usually difficult for most people and many dieters regain the weight they lost. Repeated losing and regaining weight is more detrimental to health than staying at a less than ideal weight until one is ready to make lifestyle changes that will provide long term solutions.

***Low or moderate carb diets may be beneficial for some with short term use.*** They may be helpful to “jumpstart” a person who is ready to commit to long term changes but who needs motivation to get started. Low or moderate carb diets have a place in treating diabetes and may provide better glucose and blood lipid control for some.

***However, a low carb dieter needs to understand the pros and cons of carbohydrate restrictions, be very careful with their meal planning, and be mindful to use eating strategies that combat the negative aspects of the low carbohydrate diet.***

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