

Low Carb Confusion

By the American Institute for Cancer Research

Hundreds of new low-carb foods are making weight loss more difficult. In grocery stores, dieters search for these products, thinking that they automatically cause pounds to disappear. They stand in the aisles, trying to make sense of the low-carb claims on packages. The real shame is that people sometimes gain weight eating low-carb foods.

Why do people think a low-carb diet brings weight loss? Probably because many popular diet books say they do. No credible scientific evidence, however, indicates that a low-carb diet will lead to long-term weight loss. Furthermore, there are significant concerns about the possible effects one of these diets will have on a person's health.

Even if you decide to try a low-carb diet, the crucial factor for weight loss is your energy balance. You need to burn slightly more calories than you consume. If you eat more calories than you burn, your body stores the extra ones as fat, regardless of what foods they come from.

The Lowdown on Low Carbs

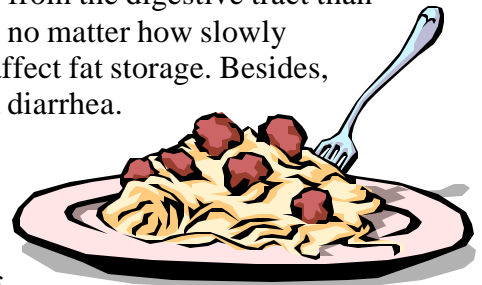
If you're curious about a low-carb diet, you should be aware that no legal definition exists for the term "low carb." Food companies use it at their own discretion. Food companies – not nutrition experts or government sources – have also generated terms like "net carb" or "effective carb" to promote new products.

Many of these products use sugar alcohols, like sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol, instead of sugar. Although sugar alcohols are absorbed more slowly from the digestive tract than sugar, these sugar alcohols still bring all their calories along, no matter how slowly they're absorbed. And it's the total number of calories that affect fat storage. Besides, too much of sugar alcohols can cause uncomfortable gas and diarrhea.

Fewer Calories for a Slimmer Profile

Some people have grown accustomed to large servings of grain products: bagels that are equivalent to four slices of bread, pasta platters that equal anywhere from four to eight of the USDA's "standard" cup servings. If you're one of these people, cutting back on carbohydrates is a smart weight loss strategy. But... any weight loss will be due to eating fewer calories or burning more, not some mysterious change in your body.

Furthermore, some foods that popular diets ban make more health sense than low-carb diet foods. For example, weight loss potential is greater with a snack of 80 calories from popcorn, grapes, apples or carrots, than with 150 to 250 calories of low-carb diet foods.



If you want to lose weight, remember that successful weight loss comes with eating fewer calories, not fewer carbs. Long-term habits of regular exercise and eating only to satisfy hunger will help your results come sooner and endure.

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