



Low Carbs, No Carbs: What's Right?

The current "low carb" trend has garnered a great deal of publicity and has many people, including some with diabetes mellitus, trying the most popular, trendy diets. Traditional diabetic diets remain the choice of most nutritionists, and the American Diabetes Association.

Here are summaries of the two diets that seem to have the spotlight.

The Atkins Diet

If one severely restricts carbohydrate intake, the body will be forced to use extra fat deposits for energy with supposed resultant appetite suppression. It is proposed that fat calories flush out in the urine resulting in rapid weight loss.

Dr. Atkins stated that by following his diet plan, people will remove toxins from the body's cells, stabilize blood sugar, rid themselves of fatigue, irritability, depression, headaches, and joint pain. By making this diet a permanent lifestyle, people will supposedly decrease the risk for heart disease, prevent, forestall or control diabetes, lower blood pressure, and prevent or alleviate many other health conditions.

The Atkins' diet consists of protein and fat in the form of meat, oils, butter and cream. During a two-week induction period people are allowed to have 20 grams of carbohydrates in a 24 hour period with these coming from salads and vegetables, not from bread, rice, potatoes, sugar or even fruit. Once the two-week induction period is over, the dieters can increase carbohydrate consumption to 25 to 90 grams a day.

People usually lose weight, but high protein, low carbohydrate diets can cause fatigue, nausea, headaches, and constipation. Because the diet all but eliminates carbohydrate-rich foods, including fruits and vegetables, it lacks the disease preventing phyto-chemicals they contain.

Atkins Diabetes Revolution has recently been published, but not reviewed by NMHCTOD as this is being written. It will likely attract a great deal of attention from the lay public.

The South Beach Diet

Developed by cardiologist Arthur Agatston, MD, according to the book cover, this diet is described by the author as, neither low carb nor low fat. It is said to teach reliance on, "the right carbs and the right fats - the good ones."

While the initial two weeks of the diet are "free" of carbohydrates, supposedly to get rid of the craving for the wrong carbohydrates, at no time does the dieter count carbohydrates. Dr. Agatston advises that to continue beyond two weeks of severe restriction of carbohydrates is unwise and will probably cause the dieter to stop the diet. He gradually adds carbohydrates in a second phase and even more in the third or maintenance phase. He does not advocate calorie counting and promises enough food to satisfy hunger, snacks, and desserts.

He bases his diet upon the glycemic index of foods and advocates unprocessed grains and polyunsaturated and monosaturated fats. He points out the health risks associated with saturated fats and engages in criticism of the original Atkins Diet for not taking these into account. The emphasis is on the avoidance of processed sugars, carbohydrates that have high glycemic indices, and saturated fats. He advocates whole grains, most fruits, and vegetables.

He does not advocate the diet for treatment of diabetes, but rather the prevention of cardiovascular disease, although he considers weight reduction as necessary and his diet as the means to accomplish it.

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