



THE LOW CARB CRAZE

With the headlines now regularly reminding us that the battle of the bulge is in full swing, the antidotes, methods, remedies, wish lists, pills, thrills, etc. can make just about anybody dizzy, even if you've spent some time studying nutrition. If all of the buzzwords and hype put you in the MEGO state (my eyes glaze over!), then consider these simple facts:

- » To lose weight you must consume fewer calories than you expend through exercise and daily activities.
- » Calories come in three forms: carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Your body needs all three forms, in balanced proportions, to work well.

The low carb craze has gotten a lot of press, with a lot of strong support. Others say it's not so good. As you find your way through the maze of differing viewpoints, here are some facts that can help you find the best balance for your body:

- » Carbs come in 3 forms: simple, complex, and fiber. There are 4 calories per gram of simple & complex carbs.

**“The best plan,
like your mother
may have told
you, is to take
all things in
moderation.”**

– ROGER ADAMS, *Nutritionist*
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- » Simple carbohydrates - sugars - have a high “glycemic index.” This means your body converts these to glucose and absorbs them into the bloodstream very quickly.
- » Glucose is the primary form of energy used by the body.
- » Complex carbohydrates have a lower glycemic index than simple carbohydrates. It takes longer for your body to convert these to glucose, so it takes longer for them to get absorbed into the bloodstream.
- » Fiber helps digestion and elimination, and is not used by the body for energy.

The low-carb theory is that if there is not as much glucose going into the bloodstream, then a person will begin losing weight as their body begins using stored fat as fuel. It’s not that simple.

Unless you are also exercising regularly, your body will indeed begin burning stored fat, but it will also raid your muscle tissue. This is not the best thing to have happen! Muscle tissue is a major fat-burner in the body, so the less muscle you have, the less fat your body can burn, no matter how few calories you take in.

Besides providing energy, carbs also affect how much serotonin is made by the brain. Higher serotonin levels are part of “feeling good,” and lower serotonin levels are often part of feeling irritable, frustrated, and just “not so good.” So, you may find yourself feeling “not so good” if you start on a low carb diet. That feeling will usually pass as your body adjusts to the lower levels of serotonin. This can be a big problem, however, if you decide to get off the low carb wagon.

As your body readjusts to having more carbs around, its first job is to try not to run short again, so it will convert more of the carbs to fat, to build “reserves.” Also, the brain gets a good carb buzz

from more serotonin, and this triggers cravings. You could almost say, “once you go low carb, you can never go back,” because if you stop the low carb diet, you are more likely to gain back the weight you lost, plus some.

You should also know about the nutrition labeling loophole for “Low Net Carbs!” When you see a product claiming this, you may believe you can have more of it since, after all, it’s low-carb, right? Not.

“Net carbs” are calculated by subtracting fiber grams and sugar alcohol grams from the total carbs, and this can be misleading.

Sugar alcohol is still a carb, but by adding an alcohol molecule to the mix, it takes a little longer for your body to convert the food to the glucose needed by the blood. So the carbs are still there, but they are more like a “half-complex” carb. These molecules will get converted into sugars and absorbed into the bloodstream. If there is more sugar in the bloodstream than your body needs for fuel right now, it will store it as fat.

But wait, there is even more to the low-carb story. As carbs are converted to glucose and absorbed into the bloodstream, the body’s natural glucose regulator - insulin - is produced to keep a healthy balance. When there is excess glucose, more insulin is made to get blood glucose levels back to normal.

The ups and downs of dieting, and especially the ups and downs of carb intake, can put a big strain on the pancreas, which produces the body’s insulin. Over time, this can cause problems with the pancreas, and that can lead to ongoing high blood glucose levels. High blood glucose levels lead to diabetes, and you don’t want that!

Sources:

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