

## Re-considering the Low Carbohydrate Diets

In November, 2002, Dr. Eric Westman from Duke University released his findings that Dr. Atkins' low carbohydrate, high fat diet may not only be beneficial for weight loss but also for improving HDL cholesterol and other blood fat levels. The six-month study found that participants not only lost an average of 31 pounds, but also that their HDL (good cholesterol) levels increased 11% and their triglycerides (which may increase the risk of heart disease) fell by 49%.

This news has many people taking a second look or a second try with the low carbohydrate diets that abound.

The Atkins diet, and most other low carbohydrate programs, are high-protein, high-fat, and very low-carbohydrate regimens. They emphasize meat, cheese, and eggs, while discouraging foods such as bread, pasta, fruit, and sugar.

The primary benefit of these diets is rapid and substantial weight loss. By restricting carbohydrate intake, the body will burn fat stored in the body. Since there are no limits on the amount of calories or quantities of foods allowed on the diet, there is little hunger between meals. Clinically, I have seen these diets are also often effective in lowering blood fats, improving mood and depression problems, balancing blood sugar levels, as well as balancing body weight.

The biggest problems and complaints about these diets have to do with the long-term consequences of remaining on the program. Researchers have shown the diets to initially produce a good deal of water weight loss through ketosis, which is not easily or healthfully maintained over time. Further, they have been found to increase the risk to kidney disease, particularly in diabetic patients.

In my clinical experience, the focus on dairy foods such as butter, cream, cheese as well as on meats high in saturated fats and processed ingredients expose the body to excess amounts of mucous, exogenous hormones and antibiotics (these are fed to the animals and then passed on to the consumer in their milk and flesh), nitrites, sulfites, etc., as well as the acidification of the pH of the body (a condition associated with chronic degenerative disease). For this reason, some years ago, my colleague, Ann Donovan, CN, and I wrote our own low carbohydrate cookbook<sup>1</sup> to combine the benefits of the low carbohydrate strategy with a concern for a diet that could contribute to long-term wellbeing.

First, to understand why these diets work, you need to know that all carbohydrates, especially sugar and starch, require insulin for the cells of the body to use them properly. Eating carbohydrates several times each day creates a high sustained insulin level in your blood. Eventually, your cells become resistant, or essentially "numb" to all of the insulin flooding past them. When this happens, the food that you eat cannot easily get into the cell to be used for energy. Instead, the body turns what you eat into storage fuel or fat.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Low Carbohydrate Companion](#), 1997, Donovan and Dell, available for purchase at (719)495-0341.

Our Low Carbohydrate Companion program emphasizes the reduction of high glycemic carbohydrates while maintaining long-term healthy eating strategies. The glycemic index rates how fast carbohydrates break down in the body and increase blood sugar. The lower the glycemic index, the better, as far as your blood sugar and insulin levels are concerned. Long-term health eating strategies include a focus on organic food, the initial elimination and long-term limiting of dairy foods, an increase in fresh vegetables, and an increase in vegetarian protein sources.

This eating plan is designed around three phases. The first phase is intended to last one to three weeks depending on your practitioner advice and eliminates all grains, all dairy, all sugars except those found in certain fruits, and limits animal proteins to organic beef, lamb, turkey, wild game, chicken, fish, eggs (never fried) and liver. Phase II and III begin to add in additional fruits, vegetables and grains that are best limited to 1 60-minute time period per day. This program includes quick menu suggestions as well as 14 days of menus and snacks.

To conclude, let me say that I have seen the low carbohydrate diets work wonders for a wide variety of individuals with a wide variety of health problems. As always, you will find your greatest success in using these diets when you have a health care practitioner who can help you tailor a program to your body's unique biochemical needs. But to get you started, here are a few of the recipes included in our cookbook:

### **Vegetable Quiche**

Crust:

1-2 cups ground walnuts and pecans  
2 Tbsp. Earth Balance butter spread

Filling:

1 cup broccoli florets  
1 cup cheddar or mozzarella soy or almond cheese, grated  
¼ cup soy or almond milk  
6 eggs, beaten  
3 green onions, chopped  
¼ tsp nutmeg  
¼ tsp sea salt

Grind nuts and mix well with melted butter spread. Line pie pan with mixture and set aside. Steam broccoli until crisp tender. Rinse with cold water, drain, set aside. Combine cheese and milk in blender or food processor to make a smooth mixture. Put the cheese mixture in a bowl and add eggs, green onions, nutmeg and salt. Pour cheese mixture into pie shell and arrange broccoli on top, pressing it into cheese mixture. Bake in preheated oven at 400 degrees for 20 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees and continue baking 15-20 minutes or until puffed up and brown. Serve hot or cold. Serves 6.

### **Buckwheat Tofu Pancakes**

1 cup buckwheat flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
½ tsp baking soda  
¼ tsp sea salt  
½ box soft tofu, or 5 ounces, Mori Nu brand  
1 ¼ cups water  
1 tbsp cold pressed canola, coconut or sunflower oil

Mix all ingredients in food processor or blender. Dry ingredients first. Oil griddle or frying pan lightly with a little bit of the oil. Use about ¼ cup of batter for each pancake. For best results, let each pancake bubble up thoroughly before flipping. Makes 10 pancakes.

### **Green Chili Tofu**

1 large leek  
2 cloves garlic  
1 tbsp cold pressed olive oil  
1 4 oz. can Hain green chilis  
1 lb. firm tofu  
1 tbsp Bragg's liquid aminos (or to taste)  
¼ tsp cayenne pepper  
2 oz soy cheese

In large skillet, sauté leek and garlic in olive oil (and/or water) until translucent. Add green chili. Drain tofu well if necessary and crumble thoroughly into skillet. Add liquid aminos, soy cheese, and cayenne pepper. You may need to add more water to achieve the consistency you prefer. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring regularly. Makes 5 half-cup servings.

### **Tuna Casserole**

4 tomatoes  
½ lb. green beans  
1-2 leeks  
6 shitake mushrooms, chopped  
1 cup quinoa  
2 cans water-packed tuna, drained  
1 cup water  
1 tbsp cold pressed olive oil  
½ tsp sea salt

Rinse quinoa thoroughly until water runs clear. Mix all ingredients in covered baking dish. Bake 35-40 minutes at 350 degrees. You may prefer to lightly steam green beans prior to adding them to the casserole. Makes 6 cups.