

healthy LIVING

NEW IMAGE

BUSTING THE MYTHS ON LOW- CARB EATING



There are a few non-truths out there about low-carbohydrate eating plans. This article busts 6 of those myths and provides information in support of the long term health benefits of following a low-carb diet.

1. High protein diets cause constipation

If you follow a low-carb diet correctly, you will be replacing those starchy foods with low-carb, high-fibre vegetables which should help counter any constipation effects of an increased protein intake. A low-carb diet will provide as much, if not more fiber than you had before. Constipation can be symptomatic of many health conditions. If you suffer from long term constipation, please consult your health care professional.

2. Compliance

Low-carb diets are not harder to stick to. These diets are higher in protein and fat, increasing satiety (the feeling of satisfaction following a meal) and reducing hunger. More people in low-carb eating groups make it through to the end of dietary studies more often than those on low fat eating plans. This highlights that low-carb eating plans are more compliant than low-fat or calorie restriction diets.

3. Restricting Nutrients

There simply is NO nutrient in starchy or sugary foods that we can't get in greater amounts from animal foods, nuts, seed or vegetables. Remember that low-carb diets are NOT no-carb. There's room for plenty of vegetables, nuts and seeds, more than enough to satisfy your need for all the nutrients.

Grains, for example, are very high in a substance called phytic acid. This hinders the absorption of iron, zinc and calcium from the diet. Low-carb diets don't contain grains and are much lower in phytic acid than the average Western-style diet. A diet devoid of grains will reduce the "nutrient robbing" effects of phytic acid from the body. Positively, avoiding wheat may lead to improvements in Vitamin D levels, as the fibre in wheat has been shown to reduce the blood levels of this vitamin.

Low-carb eating plans tend to be much higher in vegetables than standard diets and as such, are more nutrient rich.

4. Ketosis vs ketoacidosis

When the body is carbohydrate restricted, it releases stored fat, which is converted into ketone bodies. Ketone bodies are molecules that can cross the blood-brain barrier and provide energy for the brain when it isn't receiving enough glucose. Ketone bodies are also used by our heart and other cells in the body for energy.

The production of ketone bodies (a process referred to as ketosis) is the body's natural response to a very low-carb intake and occurs during periods of famine and/or starvation.

This is NOT to be confused with ketoacidosis, which is something that can only happen with uncontrolled type I diabetes and involves the bloodstream being flooded with glucose and ketone bodies in extremely large amounts. There is also alcoholic ketoacidosis which is a completely unrelated event.

Ketoacidosis is dangerous, but it is NOT linked with low-carb diets. The metabolic state of ketosis has been proven to be therapeutic in many ways. It has been used to treat epilepsy as well as helping to treat brain cancer and type II diabetes.

5. Cholesterol & Saturated fat

Following a low-carb eating plan involves eating foods like meat and eggs, which happen to be rich in saturated fat and cholesterol. Doctors often claim that this can create all sorts of health problems, such as raising cholesterol levels and increasing heart disease risk. Of course there's saturated fat and then there's saturated fat. No one is advocating eating fish 'n' chips and meat pies every day, that's just ludicrous! The best kinds of saturated fat are found in coconut oil, grass and pasture-raised free-range meats, wild-caught seafood and a wide range of nuts, seeds and fruits like avocados and olives. Saturated fats and cholesterol are not bad for you. In fact a meta-analysis of epidemiologic studies published in the American journal of Clinical Nutrition in 2010, showed that there is "no significant evidence for concluding that dietary saturated fat is associated with an increased risk of CHD or CVD". This meta-analysis looked at studies conducted over periods of 5-23 years and contained 347,747 participants, so some pretty sound statistics there.

Despite being high in saturated fat, low-carb diets lead to a reduction in blood triglyceride levels due to fat becoming the body's preferred fuel source. Low-carb diets lead to a raise in HDL (the good) cholesterol and change LDL from the smaller very dense to larger not as dense (and much less harmful) cholesterol. A decrease in the ratio of total:HDL cholesterol serves as a protective mechanism and may even be beneficial in reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Fats provide lots of benefits for our bodies. Memory, learning and other cognitive functions rely on fat. It's not surprising when you consider that the human brain consists of more than 60 per cent fat. Fat is essential for the body to properly absorb fat-soluble vitamins, such as vitamins A, D E and K. Deficiencies in these vitamins have been linked with brain illnesses and other serious illnesses.

6. Weight loss

Some people claim that low-carb dieters lose water rather than fat. ALL dieters lose water in the first week of any diet, after the first week, studies have shown that those on low-carb eating plans lose more body fat than their low-fat counterparts. Not only that, but they lost significantly more abdominal fat which, is where the more unhealthy visceral fat is stored.

Long term benefits of a low-carb diet

A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine compared the long term benefits of three diets. They did this by measuring blood biochemical markers such as cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose and insulin over a twenty four month period. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three eating plans; a low-fat diet, a Mediterranean diet or a low-carb diet for the twenty-four month study period.

The data shows that overall the biochemical markers are more improved in the group that followed a low-carb based diet, closely followed by those on the Mediterranean diet. Despite what conventional practitioners say, a low-carb diet may be more beneficial for the long term health prospects of those with diabetes as well as for non-diabetics. The results from this study support that of the meta-analysis by saying: "In addition to producing weight loss in this moderately obese group of participants, the low-carbohydrate and Mediterranean diets had some beneficial metabolic effects, a result suggesting that these dietary strategies might be considered in clinical practice".

So now that some of the myths surrounding low-carb eating have been busted, take time to investigate the health benefits for yourself.

Take time to talk with people and read evidence-based journal articles in order to form your own opinion.

After all it's your health, your body your choice.

