

# healthy LIVING

NEW IMAGE

## STARTING A LOW CARB EATING PLAN



Here are some of my pointers for starting a low carbohydrate (low-carb) healthy eating plan. Remember you don't need to go full on into it if you are not ready. Each and every person is at a different stage in their eating regime. Those whose diets are quite processed may wish to start with my first pointer and allow the body to settle into that step, before adopting additional low - carb eating habits.

### 1. Cut the crap!

When first embarking on a low carb healthy eating plan I recommend cutting the processed and refined foods first. Removing these from your diet will dramatically reduce the overall amount of carbohydrate in the average diet. The following foods are the first to be eliminated.

- Sweets, lollies, sugary treats - including items labelled 'made with real fruit juice'. They are still sugar, just cleverly marketed.
- Most breakfast cereals, with the exception of paleo cereals (always check the label as some paleo cereals are also high in sugar), are highly refined carbohydrates. Avoid these if you wish to avoid the energy highs and associated lows that follow.

Rethinking breakfast ideas is often the hardest part of starting the low-carb journey as most of us have grown up with cereal or toast for breakfast. Get onto the internet and search for low-carb breakfast ideas, there are lots of alternatives available.

- Avoid all bottled drinks, that's soft drinks, fruit drinks, juices, energy drinks and mineral waters; they all contain sugar and lots of it. The only safe option is plain ole soda water or natural (unflavoured) sparkling mineral water.
- Baked goods like cakes, biscuits and pastries are all high in carbohydrate, sugar and bad fats. Not to mention extremely energy dense and nutrient poor.

So basically if you give up all sugar and flour products then you're well on your way to improving your eating habits. Try and keep to fresh whole foods. If your low-carb diet includes packaged, wrapped and boxed items, then it's probably not whole food and most likely contains many nasty additives and preservatives. Remember fresh is best! Lean protein, good fats from oily fish, avocados, nuts, seeds and olives etc and plenty of green leafy vegetables and you can't go wrong. Unfortunately you will need to give up almost all fruit on a low-carb eating plan, at least in the initial stages. Fruit can be reintroduced in small quantities, once a desired weight has been reached and a maintenance low-carb program adopted.

## 2. Be prepared for the potential discomfort.

Endurance athletes and runners refer to it as 'bonking' otherwise commonly known as 'hitting the wall'. This is where you deplete your carbohydrate (glucose) stores and switch to fat burning to supply ketones as your primary energy source.

The first week or two, you may feel a little lethargic, grumpy and moody and craving those sweet treats. Fear not, this is a temporary transitional phase and it won't take long before you are feeling more energetic than before you started.

## 3. Focus on the long term healthy benefits, not just short term weight loss

Yes, it is true, for the first 2-3 weeks, if you have weight to lose, it will start to shed as your body releases stored glycogen and the water associated with it and starts to break down fat for energy. This may be an exciting new journey for you. After a few weeks the rate at which you continue to lose weight will decrease. Don't despair, your body is adapting to a new regime and you will continue to lose excess weight at a healthy and sustainable rate. Thriving on the low-carb eating plan will not only ensure you lose weight but that you can maintain the weight loss long term and gain all of the health benefits associated with it.

## 4. Water for adequate hydration

Drink plenty of it, that can't be stressed enough. As the body sheds fat, it releases stored toxins into the blood stream as the toxins we've consumed or have been exposed to are stored away in our adipose tissue (fat) cells. Drinking at least 2 litres of water every day helps the kidneys and the bowels to successfully eliminate toxins from the body. Staying well hydrated also allows helps to prevent energy slumps and can reduce cravings. If you don't like plain water try adding half a lemon or lime into a glass of water or reaching for the many varieties of herbal teas on the markets. Remember if you want to help stabilise your blood glucose levels, stay clear of caffeine.

## 5. Adequate fibre

Cutting out grains, legumes, fruit and starchy vegetables can have a significant impact on daily fibre intake, as these foods are all great sources of fibre. In order to meet adequate daily fibre intakes (25 grams/day for women and 30 grams/day for men) ensure you consume liberal amounts of dark green leafy vegetables. Try and consume some with each meal.



If you think you are not getting enough fibre from food, then perhaps consider a daily fibre supplement, to top up the tank. Fibre, like water, is important for the bowels to help with elimination and detoxification.

## 6. Counting carbohydrates.

For the first 2-3 weeks aim to consume no more than 20 grams of net carbohydrate each day. Net (or free or available) carbohydrate is the total carbohydrate minus the fibre content. For example 100 grams of spinach contains 3.6g total carbohydrate and 2.2g fibre. Therefore the net carbohydrate content of 100g spinach is 1.4g (3.6-2.2).

After the first few weeks you can slowly increase your daily carbohydrate intake. Increase by no more than 5 grams every few days. If you are on a weight loss journey then purchase some ketone urine sticks so that you can measure the ketone levels in your morning urine. This enables you to be able to keep track of your fat burning potential. You would only increase your carbohydrate consumption to a level that enables you to still be utilising ketones for energy (known as ketosis). The amount of carbohydrate you consume whilst still able to maintain ketosis is referred to as your critical carbohydrate level (CCL) and is unique to everyone. For the majority of people this will be in the range of 30-70 grams of daily carbohydrate. For those who are on a low-carb maintenance plan or not wishing to lose weight, then aim for no more than 100 grams of net carbohydrate consumption daily.

## 7. Grab an app to help keep track!

There is a free smart phone application called the EasyDietDiary which accesses most of the NZ & Australian food databases. Use this to track your daily fat, protein and carbohydrate consumption. Don't worry too much about the energy tracking, its part of the app, but you needn't monitor this if you don't wish to. There are lots of different apps out there, so chose one that you like and use it every day. Apps can be a great way to monitor your progress and see what's working or what's not working for you when it comes to food choices.

