

Women's

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**Y**ou recently saw your next-door neighbor order a cheeseburger without the bun. Your favorite celebrity is promoting a new high-protein shake. Everyone seems to be doing it—counting carb and protein grams. **by lisa marie metzler**

The American Heart Association recommends about 100 grams of carbohydrates a day.



# the truth about **carb counting**

Should you hop on the train or jump the track?


Americans have become carbohydrate- and protein-conscious. It's not hard to stumble upon an infomercial for some new diet that promotes weight loss using a high-protein formula. Bookstores are filled with high-protein information and infomercials fill the late night slots with videos and potions designed to lower your carb intake. Why have we become obsessed with counting carbs?

"My belief is that many people feel a sort of security in following a structured, specific plan, whether it may be counting carbs now, or counting fat grams in the 80s and 90s," says Molly Kimball, a registered dietitian at the Ochsner Clinic Foundation in New Orleans, La.

Penny Knauss of Lake Ann, Mich. admits that she wanted to try a structured program. "I bought a book and read all the success stories in it and thought that I could achieve the same type of result, but after a few weeks, I just couldn't stick to the strict regimen of the diet," she says.

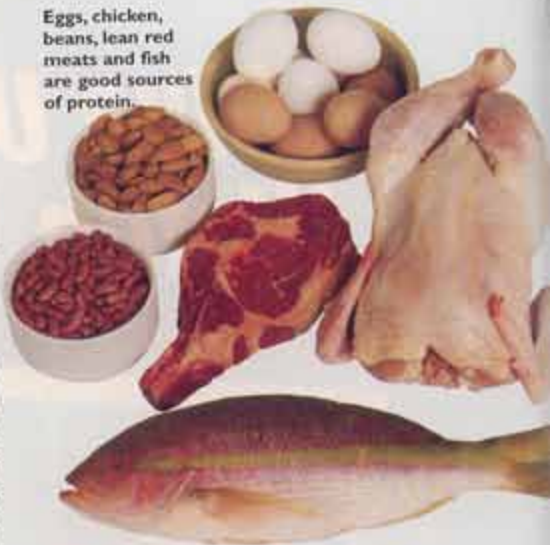
On the other hand, Jim Eichenberger, a self-proclaimed "low-carber" from Hamilton, Ohio, was able to lose 15 pounds in two weeks with a very low-carb diet. After the initial weight loss, he increased his carb intake to maintain a healthy weight. Eichenberger, who previously suffered from stomach problems, no longer has stomach pain after he initiated the low-carb diet. "Immediately upon cutting back carbs, my symptoms stopped," he says.

Eichenberger admits that it could have been a food >



Carbohydrates are a crucial part of a daily diet, but you can benefit from eating them in moderation.

Eggs, chicken, beans, lean red meats and fish are good sources of protein.



allergy, but he no longer needs medicine to relieve the pain. He also says his tri-glyceride count has dropped to a normal level and he has eliminated the need for related medications.

## Are there risks?

Various studies and tests have shown that lowering your carbs and increasing your proteins does produce weight loss. On the other hand, numerous studies report that extreme low-carb/high-protein diets, like those that include large amounts of high-fat animal foods over a sustained period of time, can lead to serious potential health problems like heart disease, diabetes, stroke, bone loss and various types of cancer.

In a journal report from the American Heart Association, Robert H. Eckel, M.D., chairman of the Nutrition, Physical Activity and Metabolism Council, states, "These diets have not been documented to deliver on their promise of sustained, long-term weight loss. The safety, credibility and effectiveness of the revised American Heart Association nutritional guidelines, on the other hand, are backed by scientific documentation.

"It's important for the public to understand that no scientific evidence supports the claim that high-protein diets enable people to maintain their initial weight loss," adds Dr. Eckel. "In general, quick weight-loss diets don't work for most people."

## What's a carb, and are there "bad" ones?

Basically, there are two kinds of carbohydrates: starch and sugar. Starch carbs are

found in foods such as bread, pasta, rice, flour and vegetables. Sugar carbs are found in juice, milk, honey, and many desserts and candies.

## ARE PROTEIN SHAKES FOR YOU?

**P**rotein shakes are a convenient way to get your protein requirements for the day. The U.S. Government Food and Nutrition Board recommends that Americans should receive about 0.36 grams of protein for every pound of body weight. For most of us, that's 40 to 65 grams a day – add 25 to 50 percent more if you exercise regularly.

Protein shakes can be an easy way to receive required protein and build muscle tissue. Some use protein shakes as a way to fend off cravings for high-carb, sugary foods. However, protein shakes, as a total diet meal plan, usually are not successful, says Registered Dietitian Molly Kimball.

"Drinking a shake instead of eating doesn't teach the individual how to make smart food choices," Kimball says. Kimball prefers to show her clients how to make and prepare smart food choices, as well as choosing healthy foods in restaurants. She adds that most protein shakes contain 15 to 50 grams of protein, while a large, 6-ounce chicken breast contains about 40 grams of protein. Choose lean proteins, especially those providing omega 3 fats, such as salmon, tuna and walnuts.

If you do use a protein shake for an occasional meal replacement or supplement, read the label carefully, as some shakes are also high in carbohydrates.

Carbs provide us with energy. (The American Heart Association recommends carbohydrate intake to be around 100 grams per day). When we eat carbs they are broken down to glucose by the body, which in turn either uses it immediately for energy or it is converted into a stored form called glycogen. For every gram of glycogen stored, there are 3 grams of water. So when we restrict our carb intake, the existing stores of glycogen are exhausted and the body sheds the stored water, hence the water "weight loss" that frequently occurs after a couple of weeks. Once the glycogen is gone, the body will turn to the fat as a fuel source. However, fat is an inferior source compared to glycogen.

Some good carb sources to fuel your body are high-fiber cereals, whole grains, fruits, whole-wheat bread, brown rice and vegetables. However, most of us enjoy the "bad" carbs, like those found in refined, processed foods, such as potatoes, white rice, crackers and chips.

"These carbs cause a quick release of blood sugar and insulin, often followed by a quick drop in blood sugar levels, causing them to be even hungrier an hour later," Kimball says. "The insulin levels are still peaked and circulating through the body, ready to store the next meal as body fat." She adds that we really don't need to count carb grams, but simply choose healthier, whole foods.

## Everything in moderation

Jessica Roswell, a public relations intern in Atlanta, Ga., was finding herself too busy to eat right or enjoy running as she previously did in college. "As an intern in Atlanta, working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., I've had less time to concentrate on what I eat and how much I can run," she says.

Roswell decided to get back on track and take the advice of a trusted personal trainer. She exercises in the morning and has a breakfast that consists of a protein shake, an egg white omelet and a carbohydrate-rich food like a bagel or fruit. Lunch is another source of protein, like chicken or fish, a vegetable and another carbohydrate, like a sweet potato. Dinner is her smallest meal of the day with very little carbs.

"I haven't had to eliminate any type of foods, just eat everything in moderation," Roswell says.

Exercising regularly and eating bigger meals while her body can burn the fuel has helped Roswell to have more energy to run and virtually ended the blood sugar drops and "sweet" carb cravings she previously experienced. If your goal is to get thin, it can be more beneficial to think in terms of getting healthy instead. Instituting a well-balanced diet and exercise plan will eventually take off the unwanted pounds. And the benefits of changing your outlook on eating and exercise, by adopting healthier behaviors, will be permanent. ●●

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