

The lowdown on low-carb



Think all carbs just contribute to weight gain? Think again. Carbohydrates provide energy for our muscles and brain, and many foods high in carbohydrates are also high in disease-fighting nutrients such as fiber, vitamins A and C, and antioxidants. The *real* key to a healthy diet and a healthy weight isn't to shun carbs altogether, but to choose the *right kind* of carbohydrates in your diet.

Healthy carbs

- ✓ Whole-grains (1 slice whole-grain bread, 65 calories)
- ✓ Legumes, nuts, seeds (1/2 cup beans, 110 calories)
- ✓ Vegetables (1/2 cup veggies, 35 calories)
- ✓ Fruits (1 medium piece fruit, 70 calories)
- ✓ Low-fat dairy products (1 cup skim milk, 90 calories)

Belt-busting carbs

- ✓ Candy (1.5 oz candy bar, 205 calories)
- ✓ Cookies (2 each, 140 calories)
- ✓ Sweetened drinks (1 can soda, 150 calories)
- ✓ Alcohol (5 oz. wine, 100 calories)
- ✓ Pastries and other sweets (1 glazed donut, 200 calories)

Won't carbs make me gain weight?

Eating excess calories in any form can lead to weight gain. So if you are cutting carbs from your diet, you are cutting calories. While eliminating an entire nutrient or food group may help you lose weight, you are also cutting valuable nutrients from your diet, which may increase your risk for disease.

Why do low-carb diets work in the short term?

It is certainly true that these diets can cause you to lose several pounds in the first few days, but much of this is water weight. When you cut carbs from your diet, you start burning carbs that are stored in your muscles, and you release the water in the process (for every 1 gram of carb you store 3 grams of water). This explains why so many dieters gain several pounds as soon as they reintroduce carbs into their diet—it is literally water weight.

Why don't low-carb diets work in the long term?

Most people lose weight on low-carb diets because they have eliminated most or all breads, grains, cereals, pasta, fruits, juice, desserts, soda, etc.—which cuts calories. Before you jump on the bandwagon, ask yourself if you can limit these foods in your diet for the rest of your life. If not, the weight will come back once these foods are reintroduced.

When I cut carbs I notice that I feel fuller, and I don't crave sweets. Why is this?

It is true the protein and fat can provide staying power to meals, and can help reduce blood sugar swings. So, use this to your advantage! Include some protein and heart-healthy fats in meals and snacks, along with some **good** carbs for optimal nutrition and energy. Remember also that most of the carbs on the "healthy carb" list have fiber (which also keeps you feeling full) and enter your bloodstream more slowly than the "belt busters."

The food guide pyramid says I can eat 6-11 servings of grains. That's too much for me!

The new food pyramid recognizes that one size doesn't fit all. The MyPyramid plan can help you choose the foods and amounts that are right for you. For a quick estimate of what and how much you need to eat, check out their Web site at <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

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Tips for success/practical pointers

- **Opt for whole grains over refined grains whenever possible.** This means whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta, whole-grain cereals, brown rice and other intact whole-grains, and whole-grain crackers.
- **Eat the whole fruit.** Fruits are one of nature's perfect foods. They provide protective phytonutrients, fiber, and natural sugars that have a favorable effect on our blood sugar. Fruit is lower in calories and higher in fiber than juice.
- **Skip the sweet stuff.** Most Americans are getting too many carbs from the Food Guide Pyramid's "other" group, such as candy, cookies, sweets, soda, sugary cereals, etc. If you want to trim your waistline and improve your eating habits, these are the "belt-busting" carbs that you should be trimming from your diet.