

# Nourishing Notes

## Low-‘Carb’ / High Protein Diets

Books like The Zone and Protein Power seem to be a dieter’s dream come true, promising rapid yet almost effortless weight loss. These high-protein diets are not something new. In fact, they’ve been around since the 1970’s, when The Scarsdale Diet and Dr. Atkin’s Diet Revolution first promoted high-protein eating as a quick and easy method to shed unwanted pounds. Do these diets really work? Are they a healthy way to lose weight?

### How do they work?

High-protein diets are based on the theory that eating too many carbohydrates-rich foods like breads, cereals, vegetables and fruits stops the body from burning fat. They say dieters should fill up on high-protein foods like meats, eggs and dairy while cutting out most carbohydrates. Many of these diets are too low in calories for safe weight loss, and the rapid drop in weight that results is mostly due to muscle tissue and fluid loss.

### Your body needs carbohydrates!

Carbohydrates are broken down into the glucose (blood sugar) that your brain and other body tissues use for energy. When you cut back drastically on carbohydrates for a number of days, your body is forced to get needed glucose from other sources. In this situation, body fat is broken down for energy and toxic compounds called ketones are made. These chemicals decrease appetite, but they can also cause headaches, dizziness, fatigue, nausea and bad breath. (This so-called “keto breath” has been said to smell like a combination of nail polish and overripe pineapples!) Ketones boost the blood’s uric acid level which may lead to gout or kidney stones. In the absence of sufficient carbohydrate, your body also breaks down muscle to meet its energy needs. As we lose muscle, we also lose body fluid. This leads to the rapid but unsafe weight loss seen with high-protein diets.

### No piece of cake to follow...

Imagine not being able to eat your eggs with toast and your burger with a bun. Bread, pasta, rice, cereals and potatoes are restricted foods on high-protein diets. The limited amounts of carbohydrate these diets allow can make it a challenge to eat out at a restaurant, and dining at a friend’s home would be a nightmare. This is one of the reasons why following a high-protein diet for an extended period of time can be very difficult.

- ter, bran, oatmeal or oatbran muffins.
- Eat bean-based meals like chili or baked beans 2 or 3 times a week.

### Effects on your health?

High-protein diets lack variety and nutritional balance. In fact, the author of one high-protein diet book not only recommends but also sells nutrition supplements. Cutting carbohydrates can lower your fibre intake. This may lead to constipation and increase your risk of cancer and other health problems. Diets that are high in protein also tend to be high in fat. Meats and dairy foods can be major sources of

saturated fat and cholesterol. High intakes of these fats have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease. Furthermore, eating large amounts of protein can lead to calcium loss from the bones and make the kidneys and liver work extra hard.

### **The bottom line is...**

There are many ways to lose weight, but some methods are not healthy in the long run. High-protein diets can result in rapid weight loss for a short period of time, but at a cost to your good health. Our recommendations for weight management may not sound nearly as exciting, but they work and are healthy.

### **Tips for healthy weight loss...**

No more than one to two pounds a week is considered a healthy rate of weight loss. Losing weight at a slow pace improves the odds of keeping it off once and for all. A healthy weight can be achieved by eating plenty of vegetables, fruits and grain foods like breads, cereals, rice and pasta, as well as low-fat dairy products and moderate amounts of lean meats. Combine healthy eating with regular physical activity to achieve and maintain a healthy weight naturally, without dieting. You'll be surprised at how great you feel!

Adapted and distributed by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, Health promotion Division, 2000. For more information contact a Registered Dietitian at 258-2146 x 3100.

Copyright © 2003. Produced by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit. This resource may only be reproduced in its entirety.