

Are low carb diets safe? ^[1]

(1) Dear Alice,

I am on the Dr. Atkins' New Revolution Diet and a lot of people tell me not to stay on it too long, but no one can tell me why, except that's what they have always heard. Is this diet safe and how can it hurt you? Is it safe if you have a green salad each day along with the diet?

(2)
Alice,

What about the Dr. Atkins diet? Is it bad for you in some areas? I have been on Weight Watchers and have lost 26 pounds, but I want to lose more and am at a stand still. I know it is my fault. I am not sticking with it as I should. I thought I might change diets.

Marianne in Mesquite, TX

Answer

Dear Reader #1 and Marianne in Mesquite, Tx,

The Atkins Diet is a popular low-carb diet, which restricts certain types and amounts of carbohydrates (such as grains, starchy veggies and fruit) and emphasizes protein and fat. The idea behind the diet is that eating too many carbohydrates leads to blood sugar imbalances, weight gain, and cardiovascular problems. The Atkins Diet, in particular, has varying phases of strictness, at first limiting carbs drastically and then gradually increasing your range of foods over time.

So why have you both heard that a low-carb diet might be bad for you? Drastically cutting carbs can result in some not-so-fun side effects such as headache, dizziness, weakness, fatigue, and constipation. You may even experience nutritional deficiencies. Eating a green salad each day might not cut your risk entirely. Carbohydrates are your body's main fuel source, and digestion breaks down carbs into glucose (blood sugar). Severe restriction of carbohydrates (less than 20 grams a day) can result in a condition known as ketosis. Ketosis happens when your body

doesn't have enough glucose for energy, which leads to your body breaking down stored fat, causing ketones to build up in your body. The side effects of ketosis include nausea, headache, mental fatigue, and bad breath. Low-carb diets may be dangerous for people with severe kidney disease, or for pregnant or breastfeeding women. It's best to consult your health care provider before starting a low-carb diet, especially if you have diabetes or gout, or take diuretics, insulin, or oral diabetes medications.

Some studies suggest weight loss with the Atkins Diet is not due to cutting carbs, but taking in fewer calories because your food choices are limited and protein and fat may keep you feeling full longer. The key to low-carb diets, or really any diet, is to find a way to balance being healthy (getting the nutrients and exercise that you need) while watching your food intake. Shedding the pounds can mean shedding disease risk! Almost any diet that helps you lose excess weight can improve your HDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels and can reverse risk factors for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, bone loss, and some cancers.

When considering a diet for weight loss, there's no famine of options. Check out the Alice's archives on [weight gain and loss](#) [2] for more information on different types of diets and the [healthy eating](#) [3] category for more ideas on what to eat. Consider your personal preferences, budget, and health and look for a safe and effective weight loss plan. It can be hard to stick to a restrictive diet in the long term, making it difficult to reach a weight goal. Just because a diet is popular or your friends are trying it, doesn't mean it's the best approach for you. Besides speaking with your health care provider, you could also consider weight-loss support groups or speaking with a registered dietitian.

Under the 2010 [Affordable Care Act](#) [4], diet counseling is covered for people at higher risk for chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. Depending on your insurance, you may be able to get diet counseling at no cost to you. Check with your insurance provider to find out what's included in your plan.

Alice!

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