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THE ONLY SUPPLEMENTS YOU NEED TO GET THE BODY YOU WANT.

IS A LOW-CARB DIET ACTUALLY BETTER FOR WEIGHT LOSS?



You don't have to suffer to have the body you want. You don't have to battle hunger and cravings, you don't have to stop eating the foods you like, and you don't have to pray for results.

When you know what you're doing, you can comfortably drop pounds eating foods you enjoy and know, with absolute certainty, that you're going to reach your goals.

And that brings us to the subject at hand—low-carb dieting.

Most people don't know much about how to lose weight, but they know this: "You have to cut your carbs."

And, they think, the closer you come to zero, the faster you're going to get lean.

Well, it's not that simple.

As you'll see, low-carb dieting may help you lose weight faster in the short term, but not fat. And over the long term, it doesn't make a difference whatsoever.

If that sounds like dietary blasphemy to you, don't worry. By the end of the article, it will all make sense.

WHY A LOW-CARB DIET? WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT CARBS?

If there's one aspect of dieting that people love to argue the most about, it's carbohydrate intake. Why, though? What's so controversial about this little bugger?

Well, most of the contention is over the hormone insulin.

The problem, we're told, is that eating carbs spikes insulin levels, which in turn spikes fat storage. Thus, if you want to minimize fat storage, you want to minimize insulin production. And low-carb dieting is the best way to accomplish that.

This type of reductionism may go over well with the unsuspecting masses, but it's far from the truth.

Yes, insulin causes fat storage, but no, it doesn't make you fat. Overeating does.

No, I'm not riddling. That's the reality.

Let's unpack it, starting with a simple definition of terms.

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas and its job is to shuttle nutrients into your cells. When you eat food, it's broken down into its constituent parts, which are the molecules your body needs to survive.

These substances make their way into your bloodstream along with insulin, which helps transport them into tissues like muscle and fat.

As your body digests and absorbs the food you've eaten, insulin levels drop. Eventually, the process is complete and insulin levels settle at a low, "baseline" level.

Then, when you eat again, the entire process repeats—insulin levels rise, food is digested and absorbed, and insulin levels fall.

So, as you can see, insulin is very much your friend. Without it, you would die.

Why, then, is it demonized? Well, I mentioned above that insulin helps transport nutrients into fat cells.

What, exactly, does it feed these fat cells, though? The answer is glucose, which is obtained mainly through the carbs you eat.

In this way, eating carbs, which raises the plasma (blood) levels of both glucose and insulin, can quite literally make you fatter.

Thus, a rule of thumb is born: High daily carb intake = high insulin levels = store a bunch of fat = be fat.

And then the corollary: Low daily carb intake = low insulin levels = burn a bunch of fat = be lean.

Simple...sexy...and spurious.

An increase in total fat mass represents an increase in the total amount of energy stored in the body.

Energy can change forms but can't be created or destroyed, so the only way total fat stores can increase is by feeding your body more energy than it's burning.

You see, your body burns a certain amount of energy every day just staying alive and moving around, and if you were to eat exactly that much energy every day, there would be nothing left over to use for increasing body fat levels.

Thus, your body fat levels wouldn't change regardless of what does or doesn't happen with insulin levels.

In other words, insulin can't magically create a surplus of energy to be stored as fat. It can only work with the energy you provide.

This is why the most fundamental element of dieting that you must get right is your caloric (energy) intake.

And this brings us to the principle of energy balance, which is simply the relationship between the amount of energy you eat and the amount you burn.

Now, the unsexy truth that many people just don't want to hear is this: Meaningful weight loss requires eating less energy than you burn, and meaningful weight gain requires eating more.

This isn't an opinion. This is scientific fact.

Thus, when we're just talking weight, a calorie is a calorie.

My point is this: Insulin levels and the amount of carbs you eat have little to do with losing or gaining weight.

Energy balance is the key.

DON'T STUDIES SHOW THAT LOW-CARB IS BETTER FOR FAT LOSS, THOUGH?

Yes.

There are studies that conclude that low-carb dieting is better for weight loss. There's a problem, though: other studies show otherwise.

What gives?

Well, if you review the design of studies on both sides of this coin, something jumps out at you fairly quickly: When a low-carb diet has beaten out a higher-carb diet in weight lost, it has invariably contained more protein.

Yes, one for one...without fail.

In some cases, the high-carb groups were given less protein than even the RDI of 0.8 grams per kg of body weight, which is just woefully inadequate for weight loss purposes.

In fact, studies have shown that double and even triple those (RDI) levels of protein intake isn't enough to fully prevent the loss of lean mass while restricting calories for fat loss.

This is a catastrophic design flaw because it's not an apples-to-apples comparison.

You can't pit a high-protein, low-carb diet against a low-protein, high-carb diet, observe the former results in more weight loss, and then ascribe the benefits to the low-carb element of the design.

And especially not when it's a well-known fact that a high-protein intake is superior for losing weight. Instead, you'd have to compare a high-protein, low-carb diet and a high-protein, high-carb diet to get a real assessment of whether low-carb truly is better for weight loss.

And fortunately, that has already been done. Multiple times. And each demonstrated the same result: When protein intake is matched among low-carb and high-carb dieters, there is no significant difference in weight loss.

"BUT I'VE LOST WEIGHT FASTER WITH A LOW-CARB DIET! I SWEAR!"

A low-carb diet may not be able to help you lose fat faster, but it certainly can help you lose weight faster. In the beginning, at least.

The reason for this is the amount of carbs you eat greatly affects how much water your body retains. There are several ways it does this, but there's one in particular that I want to call out here.

When you eat carbs, they're broken down into glucose (blood sugar). Some of the glucose is burned for energy and some is converted into another form known as glycogen, which is stored in the liver and muscles. This is why research shows that increasing carbohydrate intake increases glycogen stores and reducing intake reduces them.

Now, guess what else increases when glycogen levels rise? You got it—water.

Specifically, glycogen is stored with three to four parts water, which means that every gram of glycogen is accompanied by three to four grams of water.

When you consider that the average man can store up to 15 grams of glycogen per kilogram of body weight, and that exercise further increases the glycogen storage capacity of muscle tissue, you get an idea of how much weight can change due to fluctuations in glycogen and water alone.

For instance, I weigh about 86 kilograms (190 pounds) and have quite a bit more muscle than the average man, I exercise regularly, and I eat a relatively high-carbohydrate diet (1.5 to 2 grams of carbs per pound with occasional refeeds).

Thus, a "safe" estimate of my total body glycogen stores is probably around 800 grams, which would mean I'm also holding about 2,400 grams of water, for a total weight of ~3,200 grams. That's over 7 pounds.

Now, what do you think would happen if I drastically cut my carbs? My whole-body glycogen levels would plummet, which would also flush a large amount of water out of my body. The net effect would be rapid weight loss...but not rapid fat loss.

This may be useful to a bodybuilder prepping for a show or a fitness model gearing up (har har) for a shoot, but it's of little consequence to the rest of us.

An initial burst of water weight loss may be encouraging if you didn't know what was actually going on, but now that you do, I think you see why it really means nothing.

(And let's not forget that much, if not all, of the water weight you've lost by reducing carb intake and thereby glycogen stores will return when carb intake returns to normal.)

IS A LOW-CARB DIET GOOD FOR ANYTHING, THEN?

There are a few scenarios where I believe a low-carb diet is best.

- ✓ If you want to look as lean as possible for a show, photo shoot, etc.
- ✓ If you're very overweight.
- ✓ If you're completely sedentary.
- ✓ If you're struggling with acne, eliminating high-glycemic carbs and reducing carb intake in general may help.

The low-carb diet is more a fad than anything else.

Sure, it has advantages and is appropriate for some people, but the crowd it's most fervently promoted to (fitness folk) are the ones that need it the least.

The bottom line is if you're physically active, healthy, and have good insulin sensitivity, and are looking to build muscle and lose fat, a low-carb diet isn't for you. Instead, a moderately high-carb and moderately low-fat diet is going to serve your needs much better.

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